

A photograph of a river at sunset. The sky is a warm, golden-yellow. The river's surface is dark and reflects the light from the setting sun, which is visible as a bright, horizontal band of light. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of bare tree branches frame the scene. On the opposite bank, a line of trees is visible against the bright sky.

# The Gleaner

2002-2003



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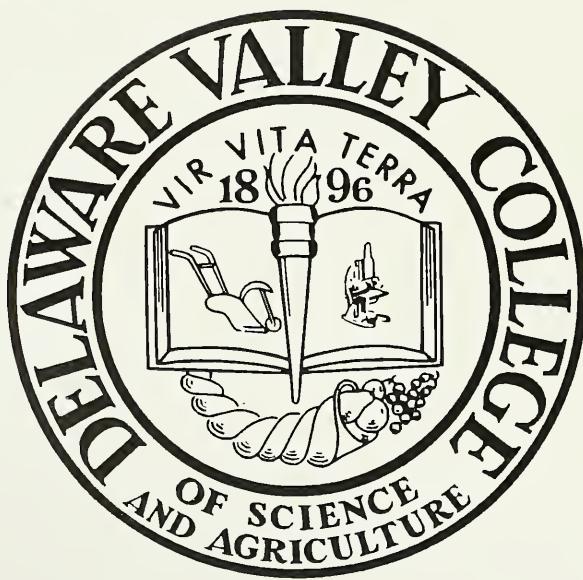
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# 2002-2003 Gleaner Staff

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## MADNESS



A clock stands alone in the mind.  
For a moment, the second hand goes back.  
It starts forward again.

And every once in a while the second hand moves backward.  
Is this a glitch in the clock or the mind?

Suddenly the clock explodes, its pieces shattering to the floor.  
The shards move slowly in the air, shimmering and shining.  
When the clock tries to rebuild itself, something's never quite right.  
It stands alone on the wall, deformed.  
The light bounces from sharp, piercing edges,  
To the once recognizable numbers on the face.  
Elegant colors of blue and red and yellow and green  
Are created by the light refracted in the prisms.

The prisms, in turn, were formed by the shards of the shattered and broken clock.

Heartless and hollow, the disfigured entity can no longer perceive or hold time.  
The balance is torn away from its face, no longer whole and confident.  
The shards fall into oblivion.  
Time is all but lost.

Shattered and hollow, I stand alone.  
In an empty world that is my madness.  
Time no longer exists, except in the past.  
I feel nothing, wish nothing, think nothing.



This is my madness.

~Michelle Neumann

~Renée McManus

## Passing Generations

From each generation to the next  
Our lives are differently sketched.  
We each have our own eyes and color of hair,  
And the color of our skin may be dark or fair.  
Some of our talents might be the same,  
And maybe we will have fortune and fame.  
On the other hand, we might just blend in with all the others,  
And live in a house full of many sisters and brothers.  
We also might have a tiny house pet,  
Who, when he dies, we will never forget.  
Look how our families could be,  
And in the end are you and me.

## Look to the Future

The past is gone and the future now upon us.  
Embrace it with open arms  
And all of your hopes and desires will be laid out before you.  
Enter the highway of another twilight zone.  
Party into the night.  
Look at the stars and make a wish.  
When you hear the wind whisper  
Don't be frightened.  
Just fade away.  
Recall and reflect on memories of yesterday.  
Lead yourself into a new year  
And create memories that will last a lifetime.

## Alpenglow

*Atop this mountain, cool and airy,  
I came upon a crisp, clear spring.  
And cupping hands to scoop up water,  
I thought I'd heard the angels sing.  
Quickly glancing all about me,  
Nothing unusual could I discern,  
'Til I gazed upon the azure heavens  
And spied blue-eyed angels playing harpsichords.  
Greeting me with lambent smiles,  
They came to rest on springy grass  
Upon which they swiftly spread a cloudlet  
As blanket for our fine repast.  
While we dined on sweet ambrosia,  
We spoke of all things good and wise,  
Then they departed-they simply vanished-  
And where they'd stood grew Edelweiss.*

*~Dr. Karen Schramm~*

## The Wonders of Water

Foothills blanketed by brushwood emerge beyond the moist misty medium.  
The low murmur of the motor trembles beneath me as we speed over black earth:  
The high hills gradually transfer into magnificent mountainous peaks,  
My delicate ears sense as if the weight of the universe lies upon them.

A fork in the road forces us to choose between the life we know of and this outside world,  
A dirt path lies ahead - we proceed, screaming pebbles are pulverized  
We turn on to unknown territory, the wheels that brought us so far begin to slowly slide  
Down an immense incline - exposed to us is a heartwood house,  
A place that we pay a visit to annually, knowing that it will still be there to receive us warmly.

The ground becomes still yet my legs are vibrating  
I slowly inch the door open and place a portion of my body on firm land  
This sector is so silent that you can hear the wild water rushing down the mountainside -  
Sounding so close that I am curious - I feel as if I am being drawn to it.

I pursue the sound of thrashing water - I approach a bridge and look beyond,  
I see tons of tremendous trees and a wiry grim passage -  
Traveled by others that felt a desire to enter these wondrous woods as I do:  
Slowly I step into a world unexplored by many.

I approach a bluff, but determined to see nature's wonder I push forth,  
I walk alongside it until I come upon a footpath,  
As I make my way down the decline, I feel my feet slip - quickly I regain balance  
I'm urged on as the sound becomes louder - I know I will come upon the source shortly.

The sunshine peeks through the trees - not far ahead I see a clearing,  
Impatiently I race ahead - at the path's end is a furious flow of spring water,  
This water jumps into the air leaping over rocks, branches, and tree trunks  
Standing at the edge, I yearn to travel downstream.

I weave under, over, left and right around many obstacles that are presented,  
Racing the river - I stop to see a remarkable figure  
Two tree trunks are crossed over the treacherous rapids, forming an X -  
I stand looking up at the sky in wonder.

A breeze of cool wind blows through my thin hair - a chill runs down my spine  
The skin of my body is damp from the wispy moisture thrown into the dense air  
Looking back to where I came from, turned and began to walk home -  
Knowing the wonders of this water would never be forgotten.

~AnnMarieArmenti

Larry Stelmach  
**A Question of Balance**

We held a bachelor party for him the night before the first marriage. He went out for pizza the night before he got married for the second time. I don't know what he did before the third try. I blame myself for the first bachelor party. I should never have let a mutual friend of ours handle the details.

Tom Roberts was the perpetual groom. Tom always had an easygoing manner and most people found him to be instantly likeable. It is a trait you find in many top sales people (unless they are in the automobile or door-to-door vacuum cleaner businesses). Tom was six foot tall and fairly good looking, with his only real physical flaw being a nose a bit too large for his long and thin face. Tom was a co-worker of mine at a company called Air Products.

Air Products is located in Allentown, PA. The Allentown that Billy Joel sang about. It is a great place to bring up a family. Its nightlife revolves around how long the Wendy's is staying open on any particular night. Glen was the mutual friend who volunteered to handle the details of the bachelor party. In the group of Tom's friends from work who said they would attend, he was the only married man. Glen really seemed to get into the idea of a party and generated an enthusiasm for the project as if he were desperate to revisit his bachelor days. He had one idea after another, finally settling on a club located in that den of iniquity known as Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The affair was to start with a nice dinner and then the club, which included exotic dancing and something mysterious called "special treatment." With that description alone, seventeen guys from Air Products said they were going to attend the party. It was all going to happen the week before the wedding.

We hit a few snags. Tom insisted that his two brothers had to attend the bachelor party, but they were not going to arrive from Virginia until the Thursday before the wedding. We considered two separate parties. Then the club Glen had picked out for the party burned down. The origins of the fire were suspicious and so were Glen's revised plans. Something about renting a boat and going down the Lehigh River with some of the newly unemployed dancers from the club. Unfortunately, there was a series of problems at work and a lack of water on the Lehigh River; suddenly the first party was off and so was planned attendance. Then one of Tom's brothers was delayed in arriving in Allentown until Friday morning. It's a long and winding story, but we ended up with a bachelor party in Glen's basement, right after the rehearsal dinner, the night before the wedding.

Glen was a reluctant host, but there was just no other place to go on short notice. As the only married man in the now small group of partygoers, he had the only house with space enough for the party. Glen and his wife, Joan, had one idiosyncrasy that had a big impact on how the night was arranged. They liked their house "just so." Glen and Joan didn't have any children and they didn't have pets. When they went out and purchased something it was usually the best and therefore, very expensive. They were absolutely paranoid about their possessions getting damaged. Glen even kept pieces of cardboard in the garage under their BMWs to make sure not a spot of car fluid would mar the epoxy painted floors. So in the interests of protecting their valuable acquisitions from the raucous bachelor party, Glen decided to hold the party in the unfinished basement.

We arrived at Glen's house at about 9:30 that evening after the rehearsal dinner. The final guest list was made up of Tom, Glen, Tom's two brothers, three optimists from work, and me. The basement was all decked out with card tables, folding chairs, a tape player, some potato chips, and a few black streamers. The place has the feel of an 8th grade graduation party. Glen's wife was upstairs-it never occurred to him to send her some place for the night. When the boat idea fell through, there didn't seem to be any point.

Throughout the night, we tried to get a rise out of Tom. Most of the members of the party were at

least a little jealous; Diane was a really beautiful girl. We proposed toasts to the end of his freedom. We made ball-and-chain references and told him that marriage was the end of his golfing career. Tom, however, smiled through all this. The smile of someone who knows something you do not. The self-satisfied smirk you see on the faces of many of the wealthy.

That made sense though, because Tom was wealthy. Well, his family had a lot of money. Some of it had rubbed off on Tom. He had a new car and a new house. Growing up, he never had to work during the school term or over the summers. His parents felt that he should enjoy himself when he was young and so he and his brothers played sports. They were all scratch golfers. Tom had won three or four amateur tournaments before he was twenty-one. He played five times a week.

Tom stopped smiling long enough to rebut our weak jabs. "It's all a question of balance," he said. "I know how I am going to manage my life. Work is important to me. Golf is important to me. My family will be important to me. When you have three key interests, you have stability. Like a stool with three legs."

Someone made a crude reference about Tom having three legs, but Tom kept going. "When something goes wrong for a while in one area of your life, you have the stability of the other two areas. If I start to play badly, there is always work and Diane. If I have a setback at work, I've got golf and Diane." He paused to finish his sixth beer. "It's all about balance," he repeated with a little more emphasis. Then a real know-it-all smile.

I had seen a smile like it once before on the face of my cousin Frank. It was in church when we were both about eleven. Frankie was so inspired by the sermon and the grace he felt, that he said he was going to live the perfect life and go straight to heaven when he died. He was going to live the life his parents wanted him to live; he would become a priest. My Aunt Fran beamed her approval. To have a priest in the family was something she had always dreamed of. Over the next few years, she spoke of her son as is he were already a priest. Some in the family referred to him, behind Aunt Fran's back, as Father Frank.

The bloom came off the rose when Frankie was seventeen. Aunt Fran came home early from work and found Frank wearing his sister's clothes. Frankie ended up moving away to New York when he was nineteen, so that he could engage in his predilection for cross-dressing away from the family's reproaches. Here is the thing: Frankie is about the nicest person in the family as far as caring about other people is concerned. He is a social worker in New York City and does volunteer work for all sorts of causes. If anyone is going straight to heaven in our family it is Frankie, no matter how he is attired when he arrives at the gates.

The conversations at the party got gradually louder over the next few hours. The partygoers got into the heavy drinking. All except me. I don't drink, which can be a major handicap at an event like this because I never seem to be having as much fun as everyone else is.

About midnight, Glen was looking for a reason to get us out of the house. Everyone was intoxicated (or very close to it) except for Glen and me. Tom and his younger brothers were definitely in the worst shape of the group. One of Tom's brothers had been doing "Mr. Ed" imitations (from the old TV show about the talking horse). His routine consisted of one line: "Ohhh, Wilburrrrrrrrrrr." Then he would stamp one foot a few times. It was funny up to the tenth time he did it. Then Clark Beck, one of the financial analysts who worked with Tom, started to bellow, "Where's the whores." Clark is six foot three and very stocky. This sent Glen into a tizzy. His wife was upstairs and we clearly were not on a boat in the middle of the Lehigh River. Glen declared the party over.

I told Tom and his brothers that I could drive them home. Tom had a house (that his parents had

helped him buy) located about eight miles away. We had two cars between us, but I figured we could come back before the wedding for the one we left. The three not-so-optimistic-anymore guys from work said good night and departed.

Glen was in a panic about spilled drinks on his basement floor so I helped him clean up while Tom and his brothers went outside to get some fresh air. They were only gone about three minutes when I heard a car start up and drive off. I dashed up the stairs to find that Tom and his brothers had left in Tom's car.

I got in my car and started after them. It had just started to rain and the wind was picking up and blowing paper and leaves across the highway. The route to Tom's house was mostly interstate highway and I expected to find them astride the concrete median or in a ditch to the side of the road. To my relief, I spotted them on the road ahead, but there was something wrong. I was catching up to them way too fast.

As I drove up behind them, I noticed three things: they were going 35 miles an hour on an interstate highway with their emergency flashers on, they were straddling the dividing line for the two lanes, and Tom was hanging out the passenger side window, vomiting on the car and the highway. It was like looking at one of the reality shows on TV. The ones you watch and then say, "How could those idiots be so stupid?" I expected the state police at any second. I wondered how much bail would be.

I didn't know what to do. The thought of honking my horn and trying to signal them to pullover was quickly dismissed on the grounds that it might frighten them into veering into something. I thought of trying to pass the, but I was afraid of getting sideswiped or having them think I wanted to race. So, I was frozen into inaction. I just kept looking at them and looking in the rearview mirror. The trip to Tom's house was 8 miles and only took 15 minutes. It was a long 15 minutes. Only one other car came up to us going in our direction and Tom's brother moved to the right to let him pass.

Miraculously, we made it to Tom's house. My first questions to the driving brother were: "Are you crazy?" and "Why were you straddling the lane divider?" He said he couldn't see much because it was raining and he lost his glasses. He could, however, see the broken line down the middle of the road so he stayed on it to make sure he stayed on the road. That passes for responsible thinking in Virginia.

I looked in Tom's car. Tom was passed out in the front seat and the other brother was passed out in the back. I dragged Tom out while the driver worked on the other brother. Right away we had another problem. I couldn't find Tom's house key. It was not on the ring with the car keys and it was not on Tom's person. At least as far as I could tell. He reeked of alcohol and his previous stomach distress and I really didn't like being that close to him.

It was raining, one o'clock in the morning, and we were standing in front of Tom's house like homeless refugees. Tom started to come around a little, so I asked him if any of the neighbors had a key. He mumbled that yes, the neighbor behind his house had a key. I remembered this neighbor. He was a Vietnamese veteran with a notable temper and a gun collection. Knocking on his door did not seem to be an option to me, but now the revived brother had another option I liked even less. He grabbed a loose brick from the landscaping and headed around to the back of the house. "I'll break a window in back," he called over his shoulder. I told him I didn't think that was a very good idea. He offered to make it a small window, but I held firm. I decided to take everyone back to my apartment, so I loaded everyone back in the car. We had just started to drive off when the younger brother said, "I've found them." Tom had given him the keys for safekeeping and he had come across them reaching into his pocket for some gum. I turned the car around and drove back to Tom's house.

Tom was still about semi-conscious at this point. My plan was to carry him upstairs and put him to bed, but his brothers were insistent that we sober him up first. "So he doesn't go like Momma Cass," was their reasoning. (A note to my younger readers: Momma Cass was the full figured gal in the singing group "The Mammas and the Pappas." She had died in her sleep of asphyxiation a few years before). I had my doubts that Tom had anything left in his stomach after what I saw while I was following them in the car, but nevertheless, we carried him upstairs and his two brothers proceeded to sober him up. My efforts to stop them received the admonishment that I wasn't a brother and that they knew what was best for him. They were a very close family.

They ran a cold bath and stripped Tom naked and put him in the tub. They then got him to drink two or three cups of coffee. I can remember Tom sitting naked in that ice cold bath, shivering with the cold, crying that the coffee was bitter, moaning that he was an asshole for getting drunk and sobbing that he didn't deserve to have brothers like them. No, you don't, I remember thinking. We finally put Tom to bed about 3 a.m.

Tom did make it to the wedding the next day. He looked like hell. Diane was furious. It was not an auspicious start to the marriage. I still thought they had a chance of making the marriage work, though. That is, until the day I helped Tom plant some trees.

Tom had never done a lot of work on the outside of his house. He had never done much on the inside either - the walls were all painted builder's white before Diane moved in. The backyard did not have anything on it that Tom couldn't drive over on a mower. His new bride, however, had other tastes. She pictured an English garden right there in her Allentown backyard. Tom resisted doing anything for the first eleven months of the marriage. Spring came and went. Finally, in August he agreed to plant eight Christmas type trees to define the back boundary of the yard and to create some privacy from the Vietnamese veteran who lived in the house behind theirs.

I offered to help when I heard them discussing the plan at work. (Diane also worked at Air Products in accounting). So, early one Saturday morning, I arrived at their house with my post hole digger. I was immediately sorry I had offered my assistance. Diane had purchased eight huge evergreen trees. The root balls were enormous. Reluctantly, Tom and I went out to the back yard to start digging holes. Diane went into the house to continue her perpetual painting project. The ground was incredibly hard; it was all clay and rocks. It took almost a half an hour of solid work to get one hole big enough for one of the root balls (never mind the instructions to dig a hole that was one and one-half times the size). After the holes were completed, our next job was to balance the trees one by one on a wheelbarrow, then muscle them from the front driveway to the backyard. For a rich guy, Tom had the worst looking wheelbarrow. It was a Fred Flintstone model: incredibly heavy with chipped wheels that were almost square in shape. One after another we yanked these gigantic trees to the backyard, then jerked and prodded them into their holes. We watered them and packed them in with dirt. We staked them and put mulch around the bases.

We had just put in the last tree when Diane came out. We were now about four hours into this project not counting our lunch break. She stood and stared at the trees for a minute, frowned and started to cry. When Tom asked why she was crying, she pointed out that the trees were not symmetrically arranged. We had the two biggest trees at one end and two of the smallest at the far end. She asked us to switch two of the trees. Also, two of the ones in the correct spot did not have their good sides facing the house. She wanted these trees dug up and spun 180 degrees.

Tom looked at her, dropped his shovel and went in the house. She and I stood silently together in the backyard. I looked at the trees and she stared at the house. After a couple of minutes, she went into the house. I stood in the backyard for five more minutes. No one appeared. Not a sound came from the house. I picked up my post hole digger and I went home.

Tom continued his normal life. He worked hard and put in a lot of hours at work. Since her family was in the area, all of their vacations were spent going to Virginia to visit his parents and brothers. Tom found time to spend four or five days a week playing golf. He was winning all sorts of amateur tournaments in Eastern Pennsylvania. Diane spent more and more time at her parents' house while Tom played golf or stayed late at work. Two months after the tree plantings, she moved back in with her parents and they served papers on each other.

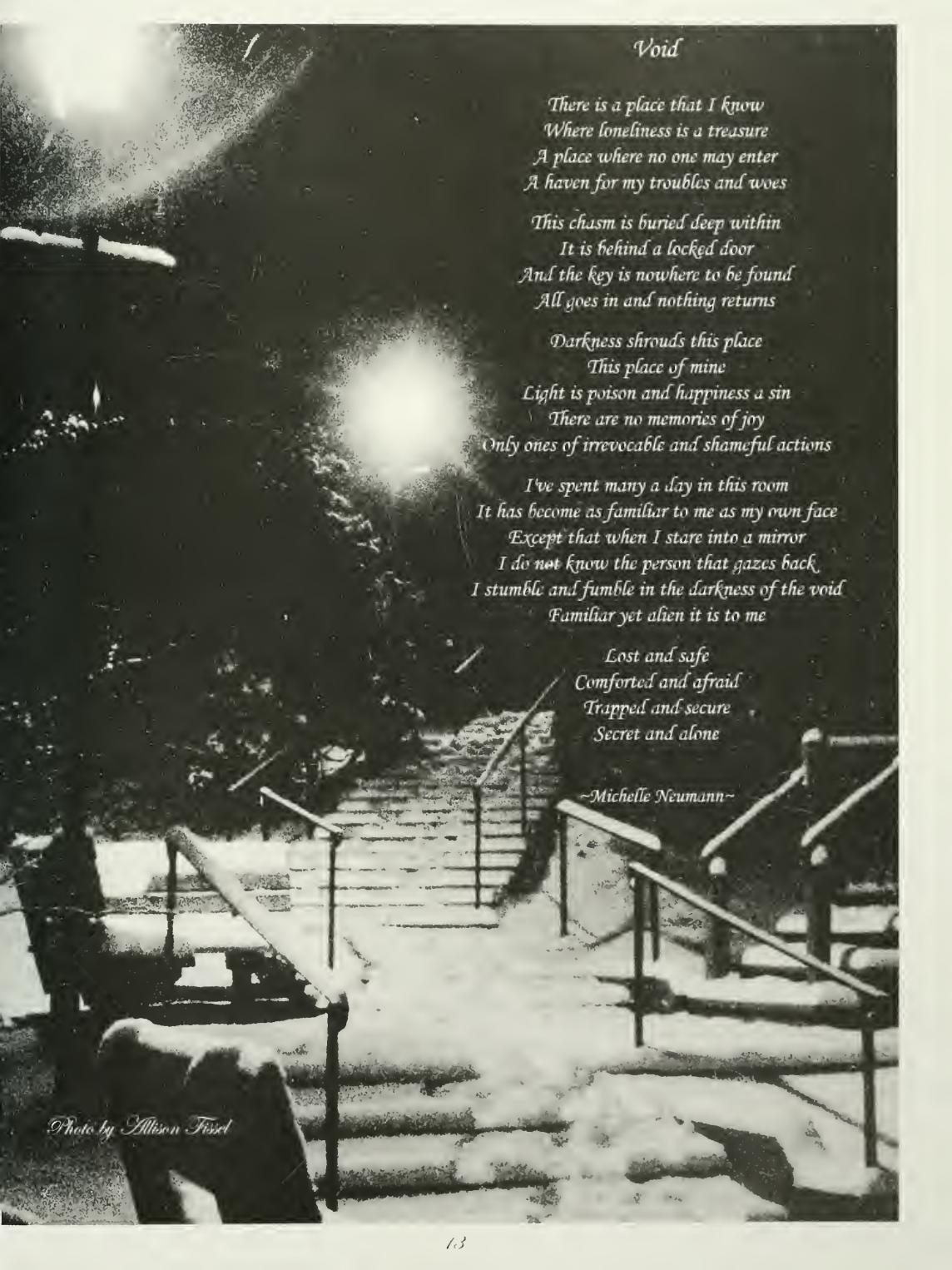
Tom stayed single for about four years. Then he started dating a nineteen-year-old girl in the Air Products secretarial pool. Tom was thirty-one at this point. Julia was terrific. She was outgoing, athletic and not moody like Diane had been. She liked to go to bed early, but wouldn't go to sleep before midnight. Julia thought Tom was the perfect man. She was, after all, nineteen. I had been married about a year and my wife loved Julia. We double dated with them a lot, and we all played on the same co-ed softball team at work. After a whirlwind courtship, they were married in Tom's living room. I looked out through the dining room to the backyard during the ceremony. Seven of the evergreen trees we had planted had died off by then. Just one lonely evergreen stood in the far corner and it didn't look like it was in the best of shape.

Things started out well in the second go round. Although she was not wild about it, Julia agreed to keep living in the same house as Tom's first wife. Julia and Tom had three kids in the next five years. Tom worked hard and put in a lot of hours at work. He cut down his golf to three times a week and didn't win quite as many tournaments anymore. All their vacations were spent visiting Tom's parents and brothers in Virginia because Julia's family lived in Allentown. Over the years, Tom didn't seem to change, but Julia did. She started to voice her own opinions instead of deferring to Tom. She started to read a lot more. She was promoted to a position at Air Products where she was doing inside sales on the telephone. She was very good at it. One day, Julia ran away to Alabama with one of her co-workers, a divorced man about her age. She left a note for Tom saying she was tired of their lifestyle, tired of his family, and she felt living with Tom was keeping her from being who she wanted to be. She took the children with her. Tom seemed to go completely gray (in hair color and complexion) in a matter of weeks. There was a big custody battle. Two years after the divorce he started dating another woman from Air Products. I told him he should try another company (for women at least). He decided to give marriage one more try and so they eloped.

Tom's story is one that I find difficult to reconcile with my previous ideas of how to get the most out of life. If you asked me in my twenties if I would like to be wealthy, date and marry beautiful women, have an incredible golf game and be very successful at work, the answer is obvious. And yet, Tom has had an unhappy life by his own account. He looks ten years older than he is.

Balance is important. Without it, you would always be falling off your bicycle. You'd be unable to carry your tray through the lunch line. You'd find yourself being obsessive and single-minded. But, balance alone isn't happiness.

Happiness has a light touch. It laughs at you, if you order it to come over. If you try to grab it by the neck, it dances just out of your reach. It can arrive unexpectedly in the middle of the night. It may stay as a houseguest for years and suddenly depart without leaving so much as a note. Happiness is balanced on the head of a pin.



## Void

*There is a place that I know  
Where loneliness is a treasure  
A place where no one may enter  
A haven for my troubles and woes*

*This chasm is buried deep within  
It is behind a locked door  
And the key is nowhere to be found  
All goes in and nothing returns*

*Darkness shrouds this place  
This place of mine  
Light is poison and happiness a sin  
There are no memories of joy  
Only ones of irrevocable and shameful actions*

*I've spent many a day in this room  
It has become as familiar to me as my own face  
Except that when I stare into a mirror  
I do not know the person that gazes back  
I stumble and fumble in the darkness of the void  
Familiar yet alien it is to me*

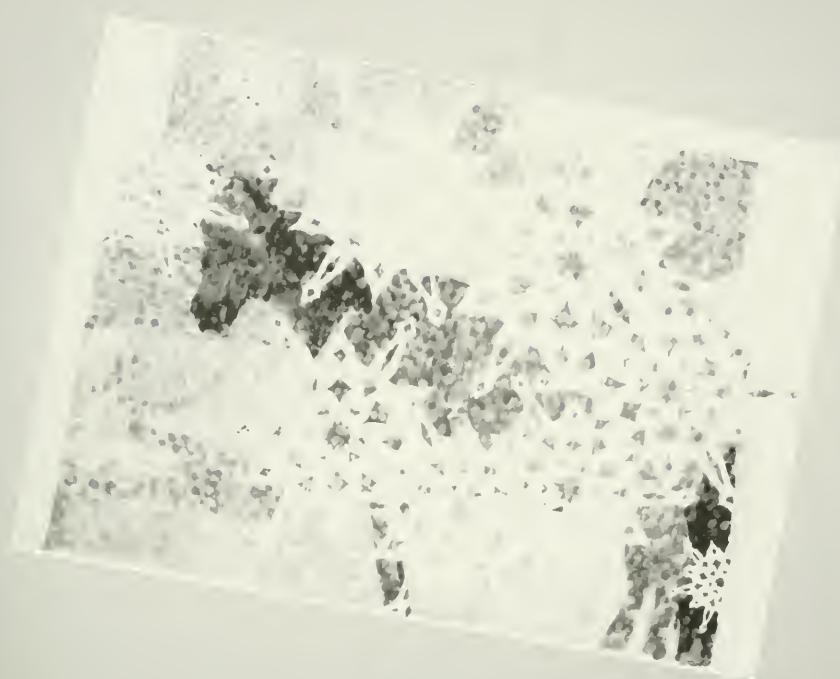
*Lost and safe  
Comforted and afraid  
Trapped and secure  
Secret and alone*

*~Michelle Neumann~*

*Photo by Allison Fiset*



*Paintings by Cheri Marburger*



### Bonding

*What a dirt ball! Mud caked to his seal black body from his daily roll in the mud. I can slightly detect a crooked half smile as his bright eyes shine deeply. I can see him look through me, feel him bear deep within my soul and I know he knows everything.*

*He has exposed my deepest parts and still accepts me. There is no shun, no shame, no hate. Only love perseveres. That is all he knows how to do, love and let love.*

*He sighs and yawns lazily, blinking those bright, true eyes. His breath smells like sweet grass and flowers as he breathes on me and I blow air in his nose as a formal greeting. He blows back harder and makes my hair puff up. I laugh out loud as he smells my hair and nuzzles my neck, his whiskers tickle.*

*He wraps his neck around me in a protective stance and searches my pockets for treats, only to find them vacant. He sighs again and his eyes become heavy as I stroke his face and whisper sweet nothings in his ear.*

*He dozes as I sit with him in his stall. He looks at me quizzically and then proceeds to cover me with hay. I know he thinks he is funny. He licks my hands playfully, as well as my buttons. He thinks they're candy.*

*The fuzz on his nose is coarse and soft at the same time as we press noses. He wiggles his and I wiggle mine and we have an entire wiggling match. He, of course, wins. Not to mention his nose is ten of mine.*

*He smiles triumphantly, I know because he proceeds to sprinkle hay all over my head. Wait...uh oh...too late, he sneezed, boogers are everywhere! He did it purposely, there's the smirk, the twinkle of the eye, and the nonchalant "I Love You" shove.*

### Remembering You

Runaway-what the hell was I thinking? "Romeo and Juliet did it, they died, but at least they had fun." I just thought that was all a joke that we'd run away together just so we could be together. I began thinking, "Where would we go? What would we do?" As long as we had each other that was all we needed, right? So one day it hit me. Porteloo, yeah, we'd go to Porteloo. Over in Jersey, who knows what next to, or how many miles from, or south of, there's this small town named Porteloo. In fact, I really don't know if you could call it a town. No, it was a fishing hole, nothing more. That was how I remembered it, I used to go fishing there, well boating I should say 'cause we sure as hell didn't catch anything. The place was perfect. It smelled bad, it was in the middle of nowhere, it was on the water, and it was full of hicks. It was perfect. As long as we were there, it was perfect. But then one day you came to me. "Let's go. Go where? You know where. But we can't we can't just -. Can't just what? Weren't you the one who said-?" She was right. I did say.

So here we are. What the hell was I thinking? I can't believe I could have ever considered this a hideaway. I sat there on the beach looking into the water. At least I think it was a beach. It looked more like mud than sand. Disgusting. The sea gulls even look like they inbreed. Why did I ever think of this place? Dammit. I stood up, wiped my ass off, wiped my hands off, and began walking. I was looking down. My shirt was unbuttoned, flying in the breeze, shorts were tattered at the ends. Running my hand through my hair, I brought it back down and realized it reeked of sea gull shit and crab urine, who knows what else. Dammit what was I thinking coming down here? This place was crap. It smelled bad, it was in the middle of nowhere, it was on the water, and it was full of hicks. I began wandering in circles, frustrated like I wanted to hit something. Still spinning, I reached up and grabbed a fist full of hair. All this was like when you stub your toe. You feel like ripping it off 'cause it was so stupid to hit that piece of furniture when the whole time it was your stupid fault for not wearing sneakers. I was looking down at the ground, mainly my small toe, and I began walking out of tune. Step-step-pause-step-pause-step-step-pause-pause-pause.

Then I saw you. I forgot you. You were squatting down, picking up a rock or shell or something. You took your fingertips and pushed your hair behind your ears. With the sun hitting you, especially your stomach, your skin reflected a golden light. It was hard to look at, yet impossible to look away. The skirt that came with your swimsuit, allowed a slit of skin to appear, your leg copied your stomach as it moved gracefully. You stood up and crossed your arms across your chest to deflect the chill. You looked out to the sea and smiled. I forgot about you. I began walking to you and copied your expression. I smiled. Then, you looked at me...and smiled.



## FLUFF

Once upon a mealtime dreary,  
While we labored long and weary,  
Shelling shrimp and food for mortals,  
Came this feline to our portal.

White she was a free of tether,  
Licking whiskers soft and fine;  
But alas, she had no collar;  
"Fluff" became her name in time.

AristoCATically espoused us,  
Claimed our Persian rugs for lairs;  
Whisker Lickins as her menus,  
Made her meals from Checkerboard Square.

Her curious reluctance to leave  
Convinced us that she liked our fare.  
And since that day eight years ago  
Has spent the best of nine lives here.

-Dr. Richard C. Ziemer

Shoulders hunched, he stares down into the depths of his steaming teacup. His head is on the perpetual downstroke of a nod, and his glazed eyes gaze out from an expressionless face.

Two blocks away, a homeless junkie scores his first hit of the day. Crouching in an alley: works....cook.....spike. His head rolls back as he watches the dank valley wind swirl Between the red brick walls surrounding him.

Someone's all but forgotten mother is waiting on the chair beside her bed. Inside her, chipped beef, soggy toast, and watery cranberry juice dissolve into a bland puddle of nutrition. Her head tilts slightly, and her cataract-cloudy eyes come to rest on the drab striped curtain, at once musty and antiseptic, which obscures her view of the gently snoring Alzheimer's patient on the other side.

On the shores of a nearby river, the floodwater from the spring thaw exposes the femur and iliac crest of a man in the final stages of decomposition. A feral dog comes upon it, and, delighted with its discovery, determinedly tugs the long bone from its moorings and trots away, fibrous sinews trailing.

Convection currents and Brownian movement cause the leaves in the bottom of the teacup to meander on a fixed path of randomness. His nod resumes and his clear eyes gaze out into the dark night, calm wind, bright stars.

-Young Park

CANDICE KLINGERMAN

**IMPRISONMENT**

SET ME FREE. FOR MY ONLY FRIEND IS HARD CEMENT AND PADDED WALLS. RELEASE MY HEARTACHE AND SENSITIVITY. LET ME LIVE AS A STRONG, POWERFUL BEING. I REMAIN SHELTERED AS AN ANIMAL IN A CAGE, SCRATCHING AND GNAWING TO ESCAPE THE INSANITY OF AN INSECURE WORLD. I WANT FREEDOM. FREE FROM MY LIFE. TO LIVE AS I PLEASE. FREEDOM TO EXPRESS MY BELIEFS AND ACT UPON MY FEELINGS. FOR NOW, I CONTINUE TO CLAW AND RESIDE ON MY CONCRETE FLOORING AND MY PADDED CELL WALLS. I CAN ONLY LOOK OUT INTO ANOTHER WORLD THROUGH THE BARS AND DREAM OF WHAT CAN NEVER BE.

## The Game

"Pass the sugar, dear," he said, giggling.

"Here you go, honey, she said, giggling as well, and passed it across the table. It was just a game they had.

He put the sugar in his coffee with great relish, the moody yellow diner light somehow giving his eyes a lively spark rather than a dull sheen, like that of the thirty-something waitress. "Are the kids at the babysitter's?"

She paused in mock thought, ruminating on whether or not the kids who did not yet exist were at the house of the babysitter who had not even been born to watch them.

"You did take them over, didn't you?" he said, adding a stern note to his tone.

"Of course" she snapped theatrically. "Don't start with me! Can't we go out and have a decent meal for once?"

At this, he almost lost, but managed to get himself under control for the most part, with only a slight smirk tugging at his lips. "Oh, I'm sorry, honey, I forgot that I'm the only one who ever causes us to have a bad time these days."

"Just what the hell is that supposed to mean?" she shot back impressively quickly; she was clearly the superior of the two of them as far as the game was concerned.

He wasn't too shabby himself, however; "It means, settle down and eat your food. I don't bust my ass at the factory all day for you to sit here and bicker."

This was a surprising turn of events. She had been set for a decent retort to his first sentence - something along the lines of, "Okay, dear, you're right; I just a silly woman, and don't wives get uppity sometimes?" - but the factory remark threw her for a loop. Laughter bubbled through her lips like carbon dioxide on the surface of a soda, and he followed suit, because seeing her laugh made him laugh, too. It was another game they had.

"Good stuff," he said after the laughter had subsided. This signaled the end of the game. Any comments concerning the game did. It was an unwritten law.

"Yep," she said, and she meant it. She couldn't afford not to mean it. That wouldn't happen for several years, when the lines would make their sneaky yet bold march across her face.

"It's sad," he said. He meant the game.

"I know," she said, snorting in disgust. She meant it.

They both meant it, because she couldn't not mean it.

\*\*\*

"Jesus, what the hell is your problem?" he snaps, snatching the sugar from her. His grab is too rough, and several hundred grains spill out onto the table, in a pattern seen millions of times before, each one unique.

"That's right, make a scene," she encourages, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "At least that's something I can count on."

He lowers his voice a decibel or two, both of them knowing that it will be up again before long, and likely louder than before. "I just don't understand what this fucking attitude is about. We're finally out to eat - one night out of the whole god damn year when we can get a babysitter and you're away from the office, and the plant is miraculously running on full staff without me - and all you can do is bitch."

"I'm terribly sorry." She keeps the sarcasm; it suits her well. "You're the picture of happiness, and all I can do is sit here and be miserable. Can you ever forgive me?"

"God damn it!" he shouts, and several of the patrons look over, their looks of concern masking their feelings of relief that they are never in such an awkward position. It's just a game they have.

"You're broken," she mutters.

"What?"

I said you're broken!" Suddenly there are tears, and this shocks him. It is not part of the game. "You're broken and you're hurting me, and you're not going to be fixed."

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," he says uneasily, but he picks up his fork again. This signals the end of the game. Any eating does.

But though he eats often - more than he should, probably, -- he does not eat always. No one does. It's an unwritten law.

\*\*\*

Later that week, or month, or year, or decade, police are sent over to the house, following a discovery made by his sister, who was visiting with some casserole.

"I'm sorry we're broken," the note says. When he wrote it, he meant it. The gun and four shells - of bullets and of people - confirm this.

He meant it, because he couldn't not mean it.

# Forgotten

*I hold you in my mind,*

*Yet you do not know me.*

*I hold you in my eyes,*

*Yet you do not see me.*

*I hold you in my heart, yet you do not love me.*

*I reach out to you,*

*Yet you do not embrace me*

*I want to be near you,*

*Yet you push me away.*

*I wait for you,*

*Yet you do not come.*

*I want to cry because you aren't there to comfort me.*

*I want to fall because you aren't there to catch me.*

*I want to disappear because you aren't there to recognize me.*

*I want to die because you aren't there to care for me.*

*I am not made of porcelain.*

*You cannot break me.*

*I will rise above this.*

*You cannot cage me.*

*I will move on.*

*You cannot stop me.*

*I will live.*

*You cannot kill me.*

*I will survive.*

*You do not matter to me.*

I Think Only of You

As I lie in the calm cool grass  
Alone where I cannot be seen nor heard  
The only noises I hear are Mother Nature's  
I think only of you

As I lie in this special place  
Time stands completely still  
This is my favorite part of each day  
I think only of you

I close my eyes and drift away to your arms  
Just as a warm breeze comes over my body  
My ears feel warm and soft like your whispers  
I think only of you

My blonde hair flows in the wind's gusts  
Like your soft fingers running through it  
The moment is yet to arrive  
I think only of you

My lips are open just a crack  
The sweet taste of dew is on my tongue  
Like the many tender kisses you gave me each day  
I think only of you

And the warm breeze dies down  
Your strong arms slowly let go of me  
The memory stays imbedded in my mind  
I think only of you

The sweet taste is gone  
Breeze is now wind and is cold and stiff  
Storm clouds roll in  
I think only of you

With one abrupt goodbye warmth was gone  
As the 10,000 angels above cry for my sadness  
I lie in the grass and pray for a rainbow  
I think only of you

-Courtney Brenizer

## Life's a "Beach"

Jennifer McCarthy

Life and a beach day,  
Are rarely compared,  
But when analyzed closely,  
Common themes are noticeably shared.

Eager to start your day,  
You jump out of bed,  
Just like a child,  
With their whole life ahead.

You gather your gear,  
Get prepared for the day,  
You get experience and knowledge,  
In a similar way.

The right people are found,  
To accompany you,  
To the beach or through life,  
Both scenarios hold true.

Everyone's in the ocean,  
But you need a tan for tonight,  
Opportunities are few,  
Decide which ones are right.

You get out on the beach,  
Try to find the right place,  
Just like a kid out of college,  
With the whole world to face.

Once you are settled,  
Balance responsibility and fun,  
This big task in life,  
Is a troubling one.

Next comes the nighttime  
Enjoy it, go out,  
When you're old, leave nothing,  
To wonder about.

Then comes the sad part,  
Get ready for bed,  
And smile while reliving,  
Your day in your head.

# What am I?

My stars shine bright against the blue

There is one each for State, reflecting their diversity and uniqueness

I am surrounded by red and white stripes

Red for the blood of my people who are from distant places and of different  
faiths

White for the clouds above, watching over my people and soothing them in time  
of need

For it is I who represents the strength and wisdom of my people

Throughout our struggles and hardships I rise up and reassure them that there  
will be better days

What am I?

I am the American flag

## Colors of the Hustle

Can't someone help me?  
Can't you see I need help here?  
I'm standing right here next to you.  
Can't you see I need help?

I am like you hustling and hustling.  
I am up to my neck in stress.  
Help me won't you.  
For I fear, I'll be a mess.

But their colors are pink and blue,  
just like me and you.  
Running from here to there,  
really not getting anywhere.

For it is, you see,  
They are just like you and me.  
Moody, bluery, straight-laced and wise,  
Naïve and childlike,  
down to their eyes.

Watching them sleep, curled up in space,  
under layers and layers, just in case.  
Up to their face,  
a beautiful face.  
Without a trace,  
Of the race,  
Or face.



Paintings by Ruth Jenborn

## Epitome of the Writer

*Casey Donovan*

Oscillating in his hand, the half full, four-ounce drinking glass moved as he did. Slow and unrhythmic, staggering and stumbling, it appeared the drink had also had too much of itself. He raised the glass again to his mouth and finished what remained. The burning of the liquor as it ran down his throat forced out a shallow gasp, a sign that he was fighting off the heat. He brought the glass back down to the arm of his chair and he continued rotating it. Rolling around the sides of the glass, the ice banged together and against the glass, causing small clinks to echo in the room. He sat in an armchair with his feet up on the rest. The leather that shelled the chair rarely groaned for he rarely moved. The only noise was the clinking of the ice in the glass. He had been in the room for three days, spending the majority of that time in the same position with his feet up, drink in hand, and dead stare at the ice. A lot of people will at some point think aloud to themselves and when by themselves often, they'll do it even more. He hadn't so much as breathed heavily.

It was supposed to be his fifth book, fifth book published, that is. It was due in a week and though he hadn't much left, he could not finish it. That was his biggest problem, that nothing was good enough. For him, everything had to be perfect. Not that every word of every sentence of every paragraph had to be perfect, just his point had to be perfect. If he couldn't get his point across and make it prominent, what was the point of writing? All he has to do was make his point and make it well. That was the cause of his isolation. He had locked himself in a room to find the point and sitting in a chair drinking heavily was the outcome. It was killing him that he couldn't find the right words. All he did, was sit in that chair.

At last, he showed signs of life and moved. He removed his feet from the rest, put them on the floor, and sat up. Then, he rested his forearms on his knees, hung his head low, and sat gazing at the floor. After a few minutes, he raised his head and cocked it to the side. He set his eyes on a pile of paper, his book. They rested next to a typewriter, waiting impatiently for additional layers. Every now and then, a page corner would ripple as if it were calling to its creator, asking for his company. It was a sporadic reminder to the author that there was work to be done and it annoyed him.

Ironically, the book was a reflection of its author that he himself was unaware of. It was about a man, who in his past was amazing. The man held game, riches, glory, a family, a life to be proud of, but he lost it all. All that he had earned vanished through casualties and fatalities. He decided to give up and forfeit, but no matter how hard he tried, he could not end himself completely. So he decided to rebuild, but in the process, he realized it was too late. There was no way he would gain back everything he lost. He threw away too many years and could not prevent his upcoming fate. So with his last morsels of life, he attempted to fulfill one more expectation, and hope it became one last triumph. After so, he died.

All of it was written except that last page.

His eyes stayed locked on his piece. He continued to shake the ice within the glass and the clinks continued to echo. At last, he stood up. Straddling the footrest, slightly hunching over, and pinching his shoulder blades together, which puffed out his chest, he stood as if he were about to walk into battle. His face held an expression of determination. Ready to attack...he staggered over to the bar.

As he clumsily voyaged over, he began mumbling and slurring every word that managed to exit his mouth. Reaching the bar, he began to refill when he stopped and observed the glass. Then, he observed the bottle. He decided the bottle was better for it held more; he shrugged his shoulders and carelessly let the glass free fall into the sink. It smashed into tiny fragments and that was the last chime of the night from the glass. The ocean of the bottle now replaced the chimes. The liquor waves smashed up against the sides and swished back and forth, while he progressed to the typewriter.

He grabbed the chair with his left hand and held the bottle in his right. He hesitated to sit down but knew he had to do it and now was better than ever. Slamming the bottle down onto the desk, he pulled out the chair, and took a seat. One at a time and very slow, he embarked on the typing stage. After every few sentences or so, he'd grab the bottle and take a swig. At a point where the bottle stood half-empty, he thrust upwards from the desk and knocked the chair over. He yanked the bottle from the desk and began ranting and raving across the room. He swallowed some drink, ranted, swallowed some drink, raved, swallowed some drink, ranted and raved until he eventually threw his back against the wall, and slid down to the floor. His head wobbled back and forth trying to stay erect while his eyelids struggled to stay separated. Hoisting the bottle to his lips, he poured all but a shot of liquor down his throat. He lowered the bottle back down to his side barely holding onto it, and closed his eyes.

Though it seemed he had passed out finally from intoxication, his eyelids slowly parted, and he began to rise. He only used his legs to get up against the wall, slowly ascending, still clutching the bottle. Once again, he brought the bottle to his lips and turned towards a door about to leave, when he subtly stopped. Removing the bottle from his mouth, he turned around and went back to the typewriter. He picked up the chair, put the bottle down, and took his seat again. In the slowest, oaf-like way, he typed, most likely misspelling every word he typed if he even knew what he was typing. An unrhythmic typing of rattling keys bounced around the room until finally, with a hesitated moment, he entered a period. The end. Rising from the chair, he regained the liquor bottle and turned away from the desk. In one step, he collapsed to the floor. He fell flat on his stomach, yet the bottle somehow managed to stay upright and spin on its bottom edges. It took one last spin and fell to its side, emptying its contents onto the floor, just like him. His fifth, was his final. The end.



7.1998

I've traveled across the continent  
to the land of open skies, where  
the horizon is trimmed by the  
raw undulations of mountainous  
ranges.

As I wriggle my toes in the  
rocky sand of Puget Sound, my  
infant eyes brim with the light  
of the drowning sun.

~Young Park





*Photo by Dr. Karen Schramm*

## FINAL DESTINATIONS

**Amy Boros**

Falling...

Falling within myself  
Everything is like some parallel universe

Am I coming or going?

Holding on to what I think is real.

Grasping, reaching out,

But to what or whom?

Falling...

I'm falling to a change.

Falling into myself wondering  
What the hell is going on?

This cannot be the way,

The way it is supposed to be.

Falling...

Falling within myself  
Realizing the repetitiveness

Of every lasting day.

Causing some ordered chaos

That drives me paranoid.

Falling...

Falling, but yet,

Waiting to stop.

To stop the repetitiveness

To stop the ordered chaos.

To stop the paranoia.

Silence—

Deafening silence, as I look

I look for what is the first time.

Another day...

Another day to dream, or

Another day to stop it all

Another day, but yet I have stopped.

Finally...

I stop and step out

Step out of the mainstream

Of busy people with busy lives.

Deep breath

Now I live my life my way!

No looking back!

No looking back at the ordered chaos

I'll decide my own final destination.

I lived my life with many regrets,  
Complaining that the world was cruel.

Changing and switching as soon as  
I am comfortable.

Bitching that nothing seems fair.

Nothing is ever my way.

Too afraid, too naïve,  
Always making reasons.

Reasons why I can't or don't.

It's time to learn.

Learn from mistakes made.

Follow my own basic advice.

Screw the world and

All its consequences.

You only live once,

No turning back.

Take chances, follow your heart.

Go—

Everything will change.

Forget getting hurt,

There is always someone better.

Say what you mean

It won't be there forever.

Screw the weather,

Dancing in the rain is fun!

No turning back!

No more regrets

Just a chance to enlighten

The world.

Others

Whoever.

Forget the rules

They were meant to be broken.

Be unique

Take the world by storm!

GO!!!

Do it your way.

## *Whirlwind*

*Faster and faster I spin  
I know no way of stopping  
Round and round I go  
With no hope of halting*

*I spin with the speed of angry words  
I whirl with the downward spiral of depressed thoughts*

*Out of control with no hope  
Confusion amasses to a roar  
The winds howl with my pain  
Hope and happiness are victims of my destruction*

*Faster and faster  
Round and round*

*No end is in sight  
No solace is within reach*

*~ Michelle Neumann ~*





## Mr. Invisible

David Molettiere

It so happened that by some cruel twist of fate, I had been born into the wrong family. My parents-loud, larcenous, undereducated, and overly fond of libations-were evidently aware of the mistake early on and tried to remedy the situation by constantly ridiculing me and my silent, solitary ways. My only brother Leonard, a more appropriate product of their unfortunate pairing, shared their views and added curative beatings to the regime. Since I also lacked the size and strength that my brother had inherited from our parents, I grew up the human equivalent of a chameleon, trying to blend into my surroundings as much as possible to avoid the wrath that my very presence in the family domicile incurred. I also spent an inordinate amount of time at the local library. The order and quiet inside the walls of that venerable building provided refuge from the chaos that awaited me at home and the books provided sanctuary of another kind. My bruises, both mental and physical, faded to nothingness while I explored the worlds contained within the pages of those books.

Upon my eighteenth birthday, I packed up my belongings and left. My father died soon after my departure and the last time I actually laid eyes upon my remaining relatives was at his funeral. I heard from my mother sporadically, mostly alcohol-fueled, sentimental Christmas cards beginning with how much she missed me and ending with a not too subtle plea for money. When I was twenty-one, I read an article in the local paper about my brother's incarceration for attempted bank robbery. I suppose that prisoners are limited in their communication with the outside world, and I was thankful that Leonard chose not to waste his phone calls and postage stamps on me. Eventually, after several moves from one nondescript apartment building to another, I managed to elude my mother's misses, and, by avoiding social contact and keeping my relationships at work strictly professional, I finally found myself alone - blissfully alone. I had my books, my music, my other scholarly pursuits, and I relished the peace and quiet necessary to enjoy them.

I didn't realize that I had actually become invisible until the occasion of my thirtieth birthday. July twenty-third fell on a Friday and since no one I worked with was more than a passing acquaintance, I received no birthday best wishes nor cake nor slightly risqué joke-gifts during working hours and there were neither cards nor congratulatory phone calls awaiting me when I returned home. The remainder of the weekend gave further credence to my invisibility. In the past, I'd received perfunctory waves from the neighbors having their weekly barbecue around the communal swimming pool, but now seemed to elicit no manner of recognition as I passed them on my way to and from the refuse container at the rear of the building. On Sunday afternoon, as I did my weekly shopping, I had to forgo my desire for lamb chops for dinner when I couldn't get the attention of the butcher and was repeatedly rammed by the shopping carts of other patrons who obviously didn't know I was there. When I exited the store I was the only one not set upon by the predatory, donation-hawking firefighter who hovered near the sliding glass doors.

On Monday morning, when I arrived at the cafeteria on the first floor of the building where my company was housed, it was already swarming with my fellow office workers and, as a prank, I decided to experiment with my newfound power. I stood in line behind the coffee urn and when my turn came, filled my Styrofoam cup with decaf, added two sugars and one creamer, placed a plastic lid over the cup and walked out the door without paying. No cashier called after me; no one who joined me in front of the elevator commented on my oversight. By the time I arrived on the third floor, I promised myself to never again use my gift of invisibility for wrongdoing. It wasn't the possibility of discovery that alarmed me; I feared that I was succumbing to the old adage that the acorn does not fall far from the tree and I wanted no part of reclaiming my heritage. I kept to my promise and cleansed my conscience of my crime two weeks later while walking home from the library. I snatched a child from the path of a preoccupied bicyclist, set her on the grass, then continued on my way-using my invisibility as a shield to ward off the overly exuberant gratitude of her parents. Satisfied that my

good deed more than paid for my evil one, I returned to my apartment, relishing the chance to start reading *The Shining* that I had just checked out. There was a knock at my front door before I had placed my keys and wallet on the dining room table. I uttered a mild expletive, then returned to the door and stared through the peephole at an older, taller, hardened image of myself.

"How did you find me, Leonard?" I asked, without opening the door.

"Oh, that was a tough one. I knew you'd show up sooner or later at-"

"The library." I finished his sentence while shaking my head in sad resignation.

"You got it. Now let me in. I have a message from the old lady and it's kinda personal."

Not wanting to create a scene, I opened the door and admitted him. "What are you, like some kind of monk?" he asked as he looked around my sparsely furnished apartment. "You said you had a message from Mother?" I didn't feel the need to engage him in a conversation about the merits of harmony obtained through feng shui.

"Yeah. It's 'thanks for showing up at my funeral, asshole.'"

Stunned, I sat down slowly on the dining room chair closest to the door. "But, I had no idea. When did it happen?" "Couple of weeks ago. They said it was her heart. Who knew she had one, huh?" "I'm-I'm truly sorry, Leonard. If you've come about the estate, I assure you that I have no interest in-"

"Estate? Who do you think we're talking about here? After I paid off the hospital there wasn't even enough left to bury her. Lucky for me, O'Malley took up a collection at the tavern. He said he felt like he owed it to her, her being his best customer."

"Then, if you don't mind my asking, why have you sought me out?"

"Because I need a favor and I figure you owe me after me taking care of the old lady in her final days and all."

"What favor?" I asked suspiciously. Even guilt associated with the lack of devotion had its limits. "Well, I'm having a little trouble with a guy over some money I owe him."

I sighed gratefully. I had a modest savings account and depleting would be a small price to pay if it insured no further contact from my brother. "Well, if it's a matter of a loan, I..."

"Thanks, sport, but we're talking about a major chunk of change."

"Then what do you want from me?"

"Just an hour of your time. I set up a meeting with this guy, Tony, to discuss paying him back in installments. I have to make sure it's not a double cross and need you as a back-up in case some of his enforcers show up to interrupt our conversation."

"Back-up? Me?" I asked in horror, rising from the chair. "I hardly qualify as a bodyguard-"

"Relax. If these other guys do show up, all you have to do is call me on my cell phone and we get the hell out of there."

"Oh, I don't know, Leonard. Surely you have other acquaintances more suitable for the task."

He studied the cuticles on his right hand before answering. "So that's the thanks I get for protecting you all those years."

"You? Protecting me?"

You heard me. If you'd looked up once or twice from those books you were always reading, you would have noticed that we lived in a real tough neighborhood. Kids like you didn't stand a chance unless they had a brother like me around looking out for them. If it hadn't been for me, you would have never made it past the third grade." He sighed dramatically. "Of course, I should have known that when I needed the favor returned, Mr. High and Mighty would turn me down flat."

I'd never considered it before, but growing up under Leonard's protection was not only possible, but probable. While the local bullies terrorized many of my classmates on a daily basis, the only beatings I had ever received were at the hands of the man now standing before me. The revelation that he had saved me from pummeling by strangers evidently triggered some primeval feelings of indebtedness, because I found myself asking, "That's it? Just warn you if I see them?"

"That's it, little brother. Just a couple of minutes of your time and I get the chance to straighten out my life." Then something quite remarkable happened. Leonard walked over to where I was

standing and enveloped me in his arms. "I knew I could count on you, buddy. It really is true what they say about blood being thicker than water." He released me and walked to the door. "Pick you up Saturday. Twelve-thirty, sharp." Before I had a chance to answer, he was gone.

Leonard arrived at the appointed hour and informed me of what was expected of me while driving to the restaurant. He gave me a cell phone, instructed me in its use, then handed me a piece of paper on which he had written the number of the phone that he would be carrying. He then described the men that I was to watch for. "Two of them. In their thirties, crew cuts, cheap suits. You'll know them if you see them." "That's odd," I mused. "I'd always assumed that people of that kind had hundred dollar haircuts and wore designer clothing."

"Yeah, when they want to announce to the whole world that they're connected. These guys will be trying to keep a low profile. Speaking of which, when we get there, be sure not to look too obvious."

"Don't worry about me. No one will even know I'm there. You see, I'm invisible." He looked from the windshield to me then back again, shaking his head derisively the entire time. "Ridicule if you will, Leonard, but I've conducted an experiment to check the validity of my hypothesis, and have proved it to be true. I really am quite invisible."

"Oh yeah? Then how come I can see you?"

"Because you're looking for me. I'm visible if people expect to see me, but otherwise I'm not."

"You kill me, you know that?" he said with a laugh. He was still chuckling to himself when he pulled his car into a parking spot on a side street one block west of the restaurant. He sent me out ahead of him to scout the location.

Arturo's Ristorante was a landmark in our city, an aging soldier that had managed to withstand the onslaught of nouvelle cuisine, fusion cuisine, minimalist cuisine, and every other dining trend that had threatened its existence over the years. It remained a mid-sized, mid-priced, embossed wallpapered, plush-boothed Italian restaurant where every entrée came with a plate of pasta on the side, even if the entrée was a plate of pasta. I looked through the glass entrance door and walked slowly past the windows at the front of the building, peering in at the unsuspecting diners. I walked down the alleyway and checked the parking lot. Leonard had told me to look for a black Lincoln Town Car, Tony's mode of transportation, and I spied it sitting like a fat emperor surrounded by his lowly subjects. Finding no deficient hoodlums lurking in the vicinity, I called Leonard to apprise him of the situation, then doubled back to continue my stroll up and down the sidewalk. He arrived five minutes later, nodded imperceptibly in my direction, and entered the eatery. I watched through the door as he walked to the bar area and greeted a well-heeled man about his own age. I assumed this to be Tony. The meeting appeared to be off to an auspicious beginning. Tony draped his hand across Leonard's shoulder as the hostess escorted them through the restaurant. I followed from window to window, and watched as they were seated in a booth in the back and then immediately surrounded by a sea of waiters and busboys. Thus hindered, I turned my attention from the windows back to my clandestine Neighborhood Watch. Arturo's was situated on a busy thoroughfare in the older, established area of the city, so there was a good amount of foot traffic as people traveled from block to block to shop and run errands. None of them, however, bore even the slightest resemblance to the men that Leonard had described. After twenty minutes of unproductive guard duty, I relaxed. I leaned against the side of the building, stifled a yawn, and idly watched a young woman cross the street in the middle of the block and step up on the curb directly in front of me. She smiled and said, "You won't tell on me, will you?"

I was dumbstruck-not only because I was unaccustomed to being addressed by attractive young women, but by the fact that she could see me at all. When I finally managed to find my voice, it had regressed to its prepubescent timbre. "Ex-~~excuse~~ me?" I croaked.

"For jay-walking. I know I should have gone to the end of the block, but, since there were no cars, coming, I cheated. Let's just keep it our little secret, okay?" She had an enchanting way of wrinkling up her nose to punctuate the end of her sentences. Afraid of repeating the high-pitched chirp, I nodded affirmatively, and watched her walk to the entrance of the restaurant. I left my post after she

had entered and, as I had with my brother, trailed her progress past the windows, anxious to catch a glimpse of the man lucky enough to be her dining companion. To my dismay, it was Leonard, sitting alone in the booth at the back. He rose to allow her to slide in behind the table as a busboy appeared with place settings and menus. Something was obviously amiss. Even if Tony had left the table for some reason, there should have been evidence of his recent presence. But the table had been cleared, and he was nowhere to be seen. Wondering if he had used the kitchen door as an exit, I walked once again to the parking lot, only to find his car in the exact spot where I had seen it last. I looked through the open kitchen door. There were no patrons, only white garbed chefs and helpers, filling orders with military precision. Perplexed, I made my way back to the front of the building. Leonard was waiting for me just outside the door. He motioned with his head in the direction of the corner, indicating that we should continue our ruse. I nodded that I understood and turned and walked in the direction of the car.

"Hey, bud," he said, catching up with me mid-block, "you did a good job today." Brandishing a wad of bills, he peeled a crisp hundred from the top and tried handing it to me. "Here's a little something for your trouble."

"Where did that come from?" I asked, refusing to accept the proffered money. "I thought the whole reason for this meeting was so that you could work out some sort of payment plan."

"Yeah, well, let's just say that Tony stamped my IOU 'paid in full,' and," he paused to add a theatrical wink, "I even got to keep the change."

"I'm afraid I'm not following you. And who was that girl?"

"Oh, so you saw her, did you?" He put the roll of money back into his pocket.

"Yes, and interestingly enough, she saw me. But that's not the point. Who is she, Leonard?"

"Let's just call her the payment, signed, sealed and, more importantly, delivered."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about commerce. You know, supply and demand."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that Tony Schiappa wanted something and I supplied it, not only paying off my debt but also making a sizable profit."

"You supplied him with a girl? It seems to me that a man of his stature, dubious as it is, could have any girl he wanted."

"Yeah, well, he was having trouble getting this particular girl. That's where I came in. When I was in the joint, I had a cellmate named Ritchie, who worked for Tony. Nice enough guy, but prison life bored him. He needed a hobby, so he took up singing. He gave a grand performance for the D.A. and suddenly he wasn't my cellmate anymore. It seems like he was getting ready to sing for the Feds. As you can imagine, Tony wasn't too happy about the whole deal. Anyway, I remembered that Ritchie had a sister, so I called her up and told her I had an important message for my old friend Ritchie and after a lot of persuading, she agreed to meet here today."

"No," I moaned, leaning against a newspaper vending machine. The revulsion I felt made it impossible for me to continue. "Tony's holding that poor young woman captive to persuade her brother not to testify?" He nodded sagely. "I bet my man Ritchie is going to come down with a terrible case of laryngitis."

"But what if he doesn't?"

"I don't know. That's none of my concern—or yours either. Tony doesn't appreciate people who get too nosy." I clasped my stomach and asked weakly, "And the men I was watching for? They weren't thugs, were they? They were Federal agents."

"Very astute, little brother." Wow, listen to that. Your big words are starting to rub off on me. Anyway, yeah, I was afraid that they might be tailing her and I figured that Tony wouldn't appreciate it if I brought the Feds down on him. C'mon. If we hurry, we can still make the light." I stumbled after him; my mind filled with thoughts of the young woman whose only crime was having a brother not unlike my own. It was no wonder she could see me. We were practically kindred spirits, and as such, I had sorely failed her. I stopped walking and feigned searching my pockets. "Wait a minute, Leonard.

I-I think I must have dropped the cell phone outside of the restaurant."

"Oh, for Christ's sake. Well, go find it. I'll wait for you here." I sprinted back to the restaurant parking lot and grateful that the Lincoln was still there, I pulled the phone out of my pocket and dialed nine-one-one. I told the operator that a woman was being held against her will at Arturo's Ristorante, supplied the address, then described her, Tony, and Tony's car. The operator asked for my name. Inspired by the comic books that had enthralled me as a very young child, I whispered, "Mr. Invisible, The Righter of Cosmic Wrongs." I quickly pressed the off button and started back to where I had left the last vestige of my sorry family.

"Did you find it?" he asked at my approach. I patted my breast pocket to indicate that it was in my possession. "It was right where I left it," I said.

"You okay, bro? You look a little strange."

"Actually, Leonard, I've never felt better in my life."

"I guess your little adventure got your juices flowing. We should hang out more often. It's good for your health."

Empowered by my foray into crime fighting, I faced him squarely and said, "I'm afraid that won't be possible. In fact, I don't think we'll be seeing each other ever again."

"Oh yeah? Why's that?"

"Because you're going to be leaving town,"

"What the hell are you talking about?

"The phone call I just made to the authorities alerting them to a kidnapping in progress."

"You didn't." He choked out the words, his face turning the color of an interesting French Pinot Noir.

"I assure you that I did. And when asked to identify myself, I used your name. I'd imagine that both the FBI and Mr. Schiappa's henchmen will desire to speak to you about the matter and I doubt that you'll want to be at home when either party comes to call." He lunged for me, as I'd expected. What I hadn't expected was his trajectory into the street when I used my rudimentary knowledge of the martial art Aikido to sidestep his assault. Nor had I anticipated his landing on hands and knees directly in front of a behemoth City Sanitation truck. There followed a cacophony of sounds: the whine and hiss of hydraulic brakes, a sickening thud, the cries of horror from passers-by who witnessed Leonard's demise, and, in the distance, a siren's wail. People rushed from all directions to better view the carnage and I backed my way slowly through the crowd. No one noticed me, of course. The only evidence of my existence was a mild disturbance of the air around them as I made my retreat. I decided to walk the several miles back to my apartment. It had turned into such a lovely afternoon.



*Photo by Dr. Karen Schramm*



**'BY THE HAND'**

TAKE MY HAND,  
I WILL NOT LET YOU FALL,  
LEAD ME TO WHERE YOU ARE,  
I WILL FOLLOW,  
HEADSTRONG.

TAKE MY HAND,  
LEAD ME TO WHERE YOU ARE,  
SHOW ME THE WAY,  
TO YOUR HEART,  
BLINDLY.

-JIR-

## LOVE IS YOU

Love is real. I have seen it. I see it when I look at you.  
Love is real. I have smelled it. I smell it in your hair.  
Love is real. I have heard it. I hear it when you speak.  
Love is real. I have felt it. I feel it when I hold you.  
Love is real. I have spoken it. I speak it, when I speak your name.  
Love is real. I have tasted it. I taste it when we kiss.  
Love is real. I believe it. I believe it, because I found you.  
Love is real. It is real, because I love you, and you love me.

## THE LOVE THAT CANNOT BE



*you are the only one i think of  
whether I am here, or if I'm there  
I want so much to be with you  
though a relationship, I wouldn't dare*

*you are my best friend by far  
and being with you is a blast  
though I want more, I can't  
this I've learned from the past*

*I am so torn right now  
should I tell you, or should I not?  
you might look at me with disgust  
which would make my heart rot*

*maybe it's what you want too  
perhaps you're just waiting for me to say  
to say that there is more there  
more than meets the eye*

*so much I long to kiss you  
but what would you think?  
would you be overcome with joy?  
or would your heart just sink?*

*what will come of all this?  
I will wait, and I will see  
whether this love will happen or not  
the love that cannot be*



*Picture by Renee McManus*

I wanted to write a sonnet about you  
The pen kissed the page moistly,  
But uttered not a word  
Love surprisingly difficult  
To write about someone who is dear to one's soul,  
To capture in verse  
The precious inner beauty that is you  
The skin trying to hold the vast universe  
In the palm of my tiny hand  
But how do I explain to you  
That you are a special joy in my life?  
To be with you  
Is nothing short of  
Ecstasy.

~ Dr. Karen Schramm ~

## *I Could Have Been-*

*I could have been-*

- the girl praying that she would live to see the end of the suffering;
- the mother hoping to be reunited with her family;
- the father knowing his fate, death;
- the brother separated from his family now knowing if they, or even he, would live or die;
- the baby left on a doorstep on a cold winter's night;
- the daughter asking God to protect her family;
- the son hiding in an underground cave begging God to keep him safe;
- the boy looking through the trash during the night for food;
- the old woman barely making her way to another concentration camp;
- the old man waiting his turn in line to be killed;

*I could have been any of these people,*

*but God chose for me  
the person I am to be,  
and that person is me.*

*-Renée McManus*



## Culture Shock

Stuart Goldstein

On September 13th of 2002, I finally decided to enter myself into the emergency ward at Abington Memorial Hospital. I had only been in school at DeVal for three weeks and that night was my first night working at CVS part time. For the prior week before this up until this time, I had been experiencing terrible pains in my right testicle, including extreme swelling. My thought was that it happened from a trauma there done by my seven-year-old cousin. The pain first started occurring the most after he hit me there at a family dinner. It turned out to that it was just a coincidence. I waited in the hospital all night being checked out by one specialist after another. Finally the head doctor, after 12 hours of testing and waiting, decided that he wanted to do exploratory surgery. Two hours later I was in the surgical room and when I awoke, I was told I had testicular cancer. They had removed my right testicle and they told me that they were pretty certain that nothing had spread. I caught pneumonia from the surgery and experienced fluid in my lungs, which they drained very quickly, but which led the doctor to be very suspicious. He decided to have a CAT scan done on my lower abdomen, pelvis and lungs. What they found was that the cancer had spread and formed tumors all throughout both of my lungs. Within the next day I was transferred to Fox Chase Cancer Center where I would be treated with chemotherapy. The process involved 3 months of chemotherapy. I would receive it for five days straight every third week. There would be four rounds of chemo. They wasted no time in hitting me with chemotherapy. I became very ill, dropping 20 pounds my first week in the hospital. I threw up for three months straight almost every day. It was horrible but I was strong and I fought. On November 23rd they declared me cancer free.

When I was diagnosed with this cancer it sent me flying into this entire culture that I had never experienced before: the culture of cancer patients. As a person who was never ill my entire life and knew nothing about cancer, I had no idea how many people suffered from this deadly illness. I would walk into the cancer center two, sometimes three, times a week and every time I would see new faces. Hundreds of new faces. I was one of the youngest being treated in the facility. I felt like the only person on the planet with cancer at age 18. I was treated completely different. I had so much attention given to me that I almost became sick of it at certain times. I couldn't eat anything but yet people would bring me all my favorite foods and snacks. People would bring me gifts, cards. You name it, I got it. It was an entirely different reality from the reality I was used to. My bald head attracted attention along with my pale skin and skinny figure. I felt very out of place. Everywhere around me in the cancer center was the elderly, ill and sick. I would think to myself on some days, Why am I in here? I'm 50, 60 years younger than the majority of people in here. In reality, I learned that anyone could acquire this illness. I learned it the hard way. There is this entire culture of people that exist due to this illness. No one but the people who have suffered this can understand what it's like to know that you may not live due to something beyond your control. Only these people know what it's like to throw up every day. Only these people know that cancer has no pity, no remorse and it doesn't care who you are. At times it seemed like a dream. I almost didn't want to believe that I was within this culture. There was a period where I was in denial. Where I didn't want to believe that I might die in a matter of months. I didn't ask to be entered into this culture of people, but it is something that I will live with for the rest of my life. I will live in fear that I may become a more active person in this culture once more. That I would be fighting the illness once more.

## Alone and Searching

To be afraid. Never had I experienced an adjustment, so different, so vague.

Alone, no friends. Nobody to turn to. Only frigid and cold.

Look into my eyes. Tell me how you feel. Do you care?  
Do you listen to my cries?

I reach out to you. To have someone to hold, to love.

All I ask for is a friend. A kind, loving person. One to talk to, to put my sorrows to an end.

I search for you my friend, near and far. I don't know what to look for. I don't know who you are.

I slowly adjust to my surroundings, and soon I feel complete. I have friends, but still that special someone I fail to meet.

I thought you were that person, but now I have begun to see. You are not right for just anyone. You are not right for me.

I have to now move on, and so my search proceeds. I will follow the sun, and soar with the wind wherever it may lead.

## No One Answers

I call to you. I reach out my hand, waiting for you to  
grasp. But still no one answers.

I lean forward. Head in hands and tears down my cheek.  
Still no one answers.

I feel dirty, ashamed at my past, longing for a new future.  
Still no one answers.

I look to the stars, and wish upon each one, hoping that  
some day they will come true. Still no one answers.

I long for a friend, my soulmate, someone to love.  
Still no one answers.

I wish for a new day, a better tomorrow in which I will find  
my soulmate, my tears will be silenced by a warm touch and a  
gentle kiss, and my longed for wishes will finally be answered.

*Poems by Candace Klingerman*

9.2.1998

Sunlight falling down  
through glistening canopies.  
Cirrus clouds, blue skies

10.1999

*faint blue hued storm clouds  
pelting rain lightning flashing  
early October*



10.2001

*orb of night gliding  
silent mothershadow  
graces not your pale flight*

10.26.1998

*Are you joyful each day?  
You hear the rustling leaves...  
Why do you not smile?*

- Young Park

## Rain Brings Back

I smell like dirt, sweat and rain with a tinge of horse, a faint after-swell of morning's perfume and far-off shampoo. My hair drips down over my forehead as it is too short to reach anywhere else.

My clothes are soaked through and my face is dirt streaked. It looks as if I have been crying but yet I haven't and I'm smiling all the while. Maybe I did cry on the inside as I danced in the rain by myself. I put my arms out and spun in a circle without a care in the world. I felt little again, like that kid who always makes mud pies and eats worms. I didn't have to be mature. I didn't have to care or worry, and yet I did in the same instance.

I still have to care, to worry and be mature. I can't be that little kid for so long because I have to grow up. And grow up fast because the world won't wait for me. Maybe I shouldn't wait for the world.

-JIR



*Photo by Peter Kunz*

**"He and I Are One"**

The sun beats upon my back  
His rolling gait rocks to a rhythm,  
The three beats made produce a song,  
Following the beat of my heart.

The tall grasses whisk past his long strong step,  
Blowing in the wind carelessly.  
The smell of flowers caresses through his soft mane,  
And I can smell the sweet scent of sweat and dirt.

The muscles roll on his shoulders and back,  
An animal of great power and grace,  
He looks like a quick shadow on the backdrop of the canopy,  
You would never see him if not for his white lightning bolt streaking his face,  
A shadow of mine with souls intertwined,  
He and I are one.

'For You'

I hold out my hand for you  
Inside it I hold nothing  
I have nothing to give you  
But my empty hand  
For you to rest your hand in  
And I to close my fingers round yours  
So the gaps between them  
Are no longer lonely and empty  
To feel that warmth envelope  
And the outside world melts away  
The haze dims low like the ending sun  
I will be here till the ends of the earth  
Holding my hand out for you  
Inside holding nothing  
For you to rest your hand in.

- JBR

## Life's Full of Corners

Life is like a city.

Around each corner you'll find something different.

Around one corner you might find happiness and love.

Around another you might find sadness and despair.

Still, yet around another you might find confusion.

But no matter which corner you partake of,

Remember not to look too far ahead.

Just live in that one moment and...

ENJOY!

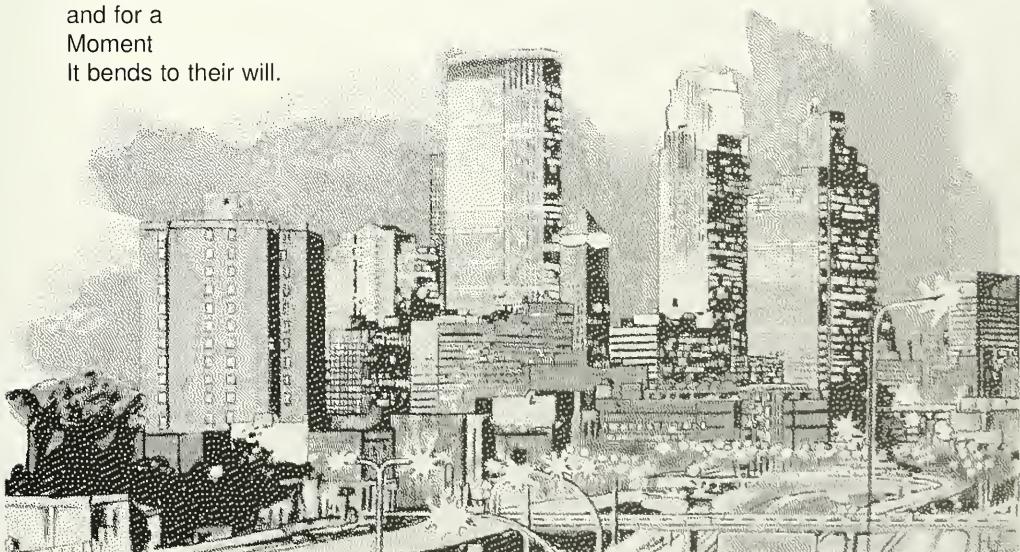
-Renée McManus

**a positive aspect of negative thinking**

he walks towards  
Her  
in the rain.  
She is hidden by the  
huddled masses  
and  
lower levels of  
city skyline  
but all the grey cannot conceal  
Her.

she walks towards  
Him  
in the rain.  
He is hidden by the  
despondent faces  
and  
lower levels of  
emotional being  
but all the despair cannot conceal  
Him.

through the sea  
They  
meet amongst the universe  
and for a  
Moment  
It bends to their will.



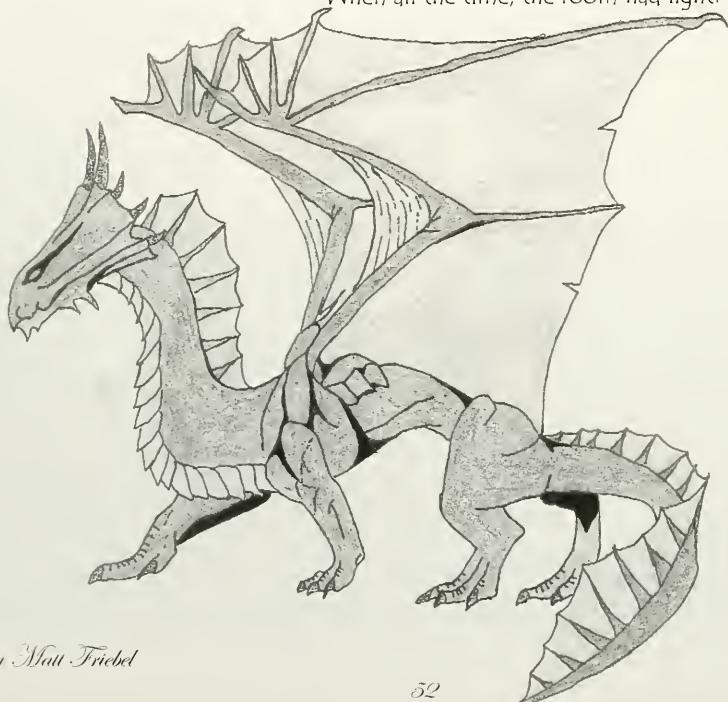
## Bed Monster

Nighty night, beddy bye, time to sleep, close your eyes  
All is dark, all is sound, all is still, yet all is around....



I hear the fan, it turns and turns  
Radio's on, the music churns  
It's still too quiet, too quiet to sleep  
The room gets bigger, the dark more deep.  
Head's on a swivel, rotating speed  
Is now real, or is it just me  
I'm scared, I'm scared, the light, the light  
I cannot reach, something's moving right.  
I'm scared to move, don't know what to do  
You're always helpless when it's only you.  
It's grabbing me now, it won't let go  
It's hurting me now, dragging me below  
Help! Anybody! I'm scared! I'm scared!  
I can see its eyes, its dreadful stare.  
Its teeth are dripping rank blood and spit  
And oh, its breath, I can't stand it.  
It's got my leg and is taking me down  
I fall fast hard, head hits the ground.  
I sit up fast to see what's moving right  
When all the time, the room had light.

~Casey Donovan~



## My Mound

I am alone, here on my mound.  
I sit on this desolate piece of earth.  
My mound is surrounded by a whirlwind.  
In the eye I am safe, though not from myself.  
One step toward the swirling wall brings chaos, anger, sorrow, and above all:

The World

The dry ground is replenished by my ever flowing tears.  
A drop turns into a puddle, pool, and a pond.  
Soon, a raging river as swift as the swirling horror runs on my mound.  
The tears continue to flow freely.

I am the swirling whirlwind.  
Confused and uncontrollable  
Spurred from the darkness within  
I am the river.  
Angry and fierce  
Spurred from the darkness within  
I am the mound.  
Hard and cold  
Spurred from the darkness within  
I am all horror.  
Spurred from the world outside.

-Michelle Neumann-

## Longing

Look to the stars.  
Embrace the past.  
Believe in the future.  
All of your goals are within reach  
Search for answers to questions unforetold  
Dream about unforeseen events.  
Lead your heart and mind into another time...  
A time when you longed for tomorrow.

BY:

Renee McManus

*Photo by Renee McManus*

## 'Pass Me By'

Don't you see,

Don't you see what you have done to me,

Have you figured it out yet?

Can you understand,

Look deep

And you will find all within,

The love,

The care,

The want,

I'm afraid,

Can it be right,

How many times will I let it just,

Pass me by.

-JIR-



Photos by: Jori C. Randell

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### **Lead Me**

I stare at the sky,  
Hoping to find a god,  
Who can lead me  
For I am the dove of peace,  
Sitting on the world's wire.

---

### **Within**

Ahead the season's harvest frays,  
As I canter through the rows,  
My horse's step does not falter,  
I feel the beauty within him.

---

### **Not Seen**

The windows are black,  
The house has closed its eyes,  
The white walls act like winter,  
Closing out the world.



*Painting by Ann-Marie Grmenti*

DreamVisions

Sparkling Riesling and a poet's dreams  
Coalesce until all seems  
Swathed in jewelled cellophanes:  
Azure oceans, sun's flambé wheel,  
Soaring mountains etched in teal,  
Radiant Heaven's honey-gold seal,  
Trees twinkling emerald, tulips glowing wine,  
Roses cascading like pink valentines  
Set creation a-shimmer in visions divine.  
Realities alter in drowsy, warm mist,  
Yet still these images persist,  
The mind's a magic hypnotist.

*~Dr. Karen Schramm~*

### Reflecting Retreat

*I run through the unmarked port, across the grass beyond Dexter Shoe Outlet,  
I reach a slightly slanted cliff betwixt the ground and gushing water beneath my trembling feet.  
I plunge, timidly landing securely in a safe-haven; I leap carefully alongside my original bull's  
eye—the babbling brook.*

*I once stood, well accompanied, on the edge as stones flew from my hands, then from my brothers',  
They soared together, fell together, creating spiked ripples in the moving stream together.*

*I harbored the bad and threw it away into the untamed water below.*

*Each rock expressing a single sensation: friendship, rage, sadness, and youth,*

*Each rock was thrown at different moments but they are all heading in the same direction.*

*Unafraid of uttering secrets to the rushing spring water below*

*Mist sprays up urging me to release my locked up anxieties;*

*The babbling of the brook persistently commands me to let my thoughts flow free, resembling*

*The movement of the water which advances without worry,*

*(Tell me! Tell me now!)*

*The brook won't spread what is secretive—it won't hold onto it for long but instead will move it  
outward*

*The everyday mass carries the concealed information, crashing against bluffs, smashing against  
rocks, destroying what is left.*

*So many visits to this spectacular streamlet on my journey home from a peaceful vacation site,*

*I will continually be dragged to the backyard of my Dad's dreamland—shoes of great value,*

*Ever will I come visit this place of serenity for many long hard years to come,*

*Ever will I remember the water dancing and jumping in mid-air celebrating its freedom, splashing  
upon my face as it forms new wrinkles from all my sobbing.*

*I want you to stop for just one instant and think of the moments you spent alone,*

*The jubilant water racing down the mountainside spraying your dried up flesh, the mighty blow  
of wind, the warm air surrounding your frail figure.*

*Do remember each moment, each tear and each smile!*

*Do remember your youth slowly turning and conforming to age!*

*I, now sixteen years old, have no one throwing beside me,*

*I stand alone in a sprinkle of past memories of my three brothers and a best friend*

*I will be drawn back to this spot as the brook recommends me to*

*(Day and night I will remain in the same space for you to return to me)*

*Perhaps this is how I hold onto my sanity,*

*For now I say so-long to New Hampshire; I say hello to my future and void of what may come.*

## My Sun

Jennifer McCarthy

When we're apart,  
It's a dark, dreary night.  
But when he appears,  
It's a beautiful sight.

It's the warmth he provides,  
And the light that he gives  
That makes him the reason,  
That everything lives.

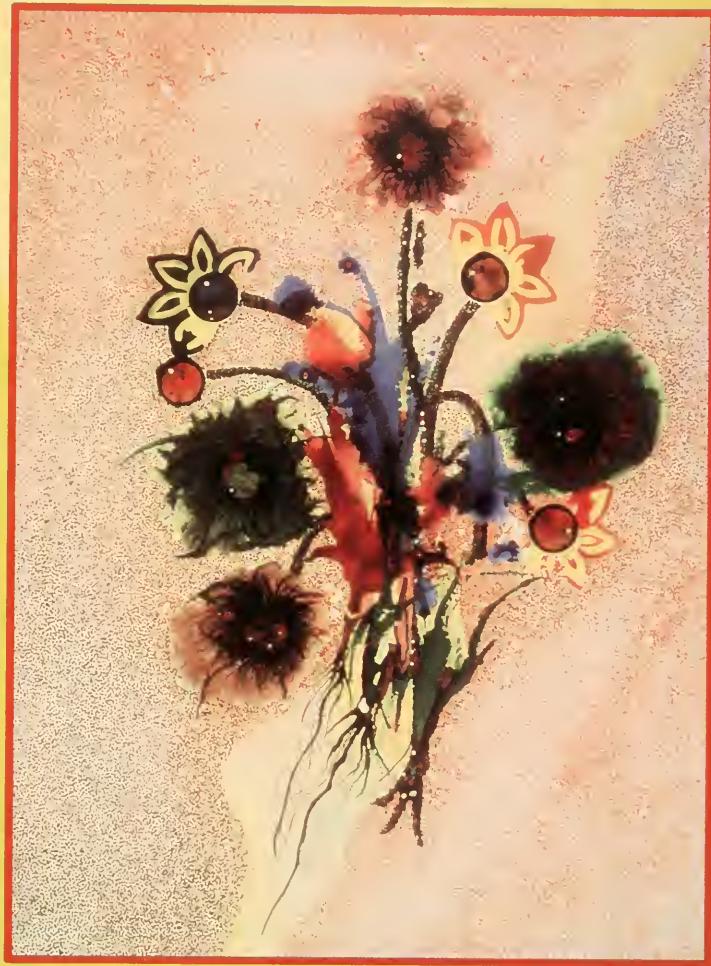
When he's around,  
I can't help but have fun,  
A dependable necessity,  
My love and my sun.



*Painting by Ruth Sanborn*



*Painting by Bridget McLaughlin*



*"Past Glory" by Dr. John Wohler*

## Excuse Me, While I Drown The World In My Tears

Something was lost today.  
Society and families were destroyed.  
Everything you lived for is suddenly gone.  
There is no turning back.

Something was lost today.  
A blanket of death covered the nation.  
The way you did everyday things has not changed.  
All your emotions hit at once like a freight train.

Something was lost today.  
You can hear the slow ticking of time passing by.  
As you try to pick up the shattered pieces,  
they blow away like sand in the wind.

Something was lost today.  
The innocence of children will never be seen by some  
Tears were set in stone, shock was imprinted on faces,  
trust was gone.

Something was found today.  
Under the rubble, ashes, and bodies.  
It was the memories.  
It was PRIDE.

## Blammer on Josephine

Hammered, "enamored," he stammered.

"Blammer on Josephine," he clamored on as best he'd seen.

Hoist the sail, oh friends of mine,  
for morning, we'll make the battle fine."

And loves sweet lost and hearts depart  
for wars we've won and those we start.

'Tis well we bid thee all farewell.  
For fury's rage, we're off to hell.

Remember this, Joe.  
Remember our times.  
Victory tastes sweet,  
but remember the crimes.

For it is to be true  
They say at the temple  
True to your life  
True to be simple.

Blammer on Joe.

I'm with you always  
Remember it as so,  
I'm with you, you know.

- Sean Dallas-



*Photos by Dr. Linda Kuehl*



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## 120 MPH

David Molettiere

A car is a car. It's a machine, a tough and rowdy roadster. It's a purebred steel animal ready to rip the asphalt, a gasoline-driven, bloodthirsty monster. Some consider it a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands and a tragic accident waiting to happen. A car is an opportunity to take to the road, see the world. It's a pathway into young adulthood, a place for young women to lay and often lose more than pocket change, a vehicle for picking up the attractive female, a symbol of a man's sexual prowess-the way a man boosts his ego. It can be a trap for the latest criminal seconds after capture, a coffin-carrier, the leader in the procession for the dead, a tool for conquering the impossible, even death-

20 mph...

Now wait a minute-a tool for conquering death?

His last notion startles Jason Keyser. He's driven the deep-red Mustang and won all the races. He still believed it foolish to staple that much faith to a machine, even this '97 'Stang with red exterior and interior, a purring V8 under the hood, ready to rumble to life should anyone try his engine against this All American Badboy. He smiles at the thought of smoking another BMW or Mercedes. The 'Stang will have them for lunch.

"They eat it and like it," he whispers as he floors around the twenty-five mile curve going well over forty. Who's to tell him differently? The cops? Guess again-they're too busy filling themselves on doughnuts.

The radio pumps out bass-filled songs-heavy metal mixed with his singing that seems to fade beneath the heavy roar of the 'Stang. Lyrics and fuel are the only keys to success and survival on the streets. Moms keep the kids in tonight; Jason's on the town. No one survives the mess when he's around.

"Deserted tonight. Abandoned streets. Where the hell'd everybody go?"

He's roaring from the city to the outskirts where the suburbs dwindle and fade into rural countryside, rolling hills of grass and trees, and abandoned farmhouses and tiny cottages. Jason drives Route 32 going towards Highway 90 into the downtown section of Ivyland Oaks. It's abandoned here too, another disquieting fact to this speed-hungry teenager who lusts deeply for a race.

Down the road, away from Jason and his ravaging path, there's a four way stop. A little strange, but still remembered after the twenty-five years it's waited there. It's the intersection of Route 32 and Bourbon Street, a street that has a speed limit of fifty. So, cars have to stop before revving up the engine.

40 mph...

The four-way stop is a place of tragedy and accident, where young drivers have decided that to be late for the curfew is too much to bear for the extra five to ten seconds it takes to stop the car and then proceed to drag its engine back to speed. There have been eight deaths, not enough to bring about change, but enough to draw the attention and the suspicious eyes of the Woman's Club. Superstition is a practice conjured more from human unease and fright, and those old women are superstitious of this place. Teenagers died here, right past the stop sign that's just flashed in the aura of Jason's headlights as he zooms closer. They died in their cars, smashed to pieces by a force unseen.

The first man had alcohol in his system. It was enough to drive his Toyota Corolla straight into the ditch, where it rolled twice and ended its poor existence with a dying gasp that might have sounded human if not for the screams of the fellow trapped inside. When they found him bled to death, it wasn't imagination that made the officers vomit.

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Two other women were going at a normal pace. Their brakes failed, another problem written off as a mechanical failure. A couple went headfirst into the side of an 18-wheeler while they were heading home. Crashed and burned, their hair was still charring as their corpses were pulled out in pieces.

Jason's not going to stop. Time waits for no man, and he's a boy pressed for time and his life, and the life of his car. Simply because he's an hour and a half late for his one-thirty curfew, and his mother and father are waiting for his sorry ass to return so that they can chew him out. The father will send the boy from the kitchen, hold him to the confines of his room for the next three weeks. No going out, no telephone, no car. That last one's enough to make the boy wilt.

60 mph...

A child's been killed there on a bike; another caught walking home and knocked off the road by someone. He had his head bashed in, neck broken-bloody, not right, and not peaceful.

Residents say the devil dwells at the stop. An old man, a young woman, or something worse. Jason doesn't give a shit because getting home is pressing down on his shoulders and making everything else in life seem trivial.

It's Devil's Crossing, said that he comes from the opposite way, comes to the cross and waits until they're not looking, then attacks with everything short of hell's wrath and fury.

His brain registers Devil's Crossing as Jason nears it and he debates whether he should take his time getting home in one piece is better than not getting home at all. But what about the speed, the lust, the yearning to have arrived home, only to find the parents asleep in bed? Let the adolescent be home, in bed, away from the dangerous eyes of mother and father.

75 mph...

Brake!!

Something makes him slam on the left pedal, sending the echo of squealing rubber reverberating into the night. Jason isn't drunk or high or stupid. He hasn't touched a beer since June; weed is a harder item to place, too far-faded to remember. Nothing else carries importance, because there's the one thought that he must stop, quickly, in front of the sign, lest he miss it at all.

A Corvette idles in the other lane, engine low. The car's taillights are on, a signal to Jason that the driver is in charge of his vehicle. The driver has perched himself in the path of approaching traffic. It's a fast machine prepared to romp and raze.

The license plate says **DEATH**, a pretty emblem on a dark and necromantic night such as this, seemingly impenetrable to Jason's deep, harsh gaze. Jason discovers that he's holding the wheel tight enough to make his fingers ache, so he releases in a quick movement that's embarrassing. But there's no one around, save himself and this other, whose tinted windows hinder Jason's view.

But wait, where's the intelligence in this? The boy feels a lump in his throat. Fear has taken form, and he tries to swallow the horror and pride. Now it's in his belly, rumbling and shaking him, shaking his mind, disturbing his breathing, his vision. "Let it pass, before you go and do something stupid," he says to himself.

He does, thankfully. He'll leave it on the highway, behind him.

"Race, shall we?" he asks himself and the rear view mirror as he checks to make sure no cops have ventured out this late. Only a few cops ever run this far out of the city; certainly none will wait at this intersection, fabled, famous, and dreaded for its location. The idling Corvette is enough of a hint that a cop hasn't passed in some time.

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The cars sit waiting next to the stop sign on Route 32. Jason is still uneasy with the enemy taking his time. The nervous boy rolls his window down with the touch of a button and waits for the other to do the same-only those with experience know that words must be exchanged beforehand. And the other is experienced, because he doesn't rip out into the lane, doesn't cut the boy away.

The radio lets out a song about a deserted highway, ruling the roads with a shotgun in your right hand, luna-cy in the other. Jason will understand where sanity lingers and drifts away-watching it as it leaves him. It's already slipping away.

"Want a race?" Jason throws it out like a piece of meat, waiting for the bait to be taken. He turns to this other fellow with the license plate reading **DEATH**.

The blonde guy glances over the passenger seat. He is a man of many more years than this teenager. He is forty or later in years and he grins in a way that makes the boy remember his nightmares. Jason snickers at this face, doesn't find an answer to why it's bothering him, but doesn't care because he's going to forget it as soon as the Mustang roars past the Corvette.

"Go till your engine dies," were the words that drifted to his ears, and the teenager turns to say something. Death's face is gone, hidden behind the tinted window. Jason is more disturbed than ever, racing a man with **DEATH** on his license plate. The race begins at the famous spot for teenage death and high incident that ends in horror, macabre.

The dashboard digital says it's three-thirty. Time for a race, always time for a race when you're a teenager and driving a brand new car. Jason has no doubts about his car or his ability. The car and he can take this other without blinking twice, but he lingers on the edge of the stop sign waiting for a cue from God. One more race can't hurt a teenager, not when he's feeling this way-emotions built on the need for speed, ready to roll and burn.

90 mph...

Start...

One roll of the engine, listen to its rage, readiness to serve its master. Listen to the way it's eager, almost going before Jason hits the gas. It's almost as if the animal within is ready to burst forth. It knows about the race, knows that this is for Jason's personal pride, and to lose is to be embarrassed and humiliated. He's not going to lose.

"Get it on!" the 'Stang squeals, pulling out slowly, then jerking forward past the stop sign. The Corvette is right with him, a little out in front, nose edging him by a few feet.

"Come on, come on!"

The blasting radio is suddenly cranked to its highest capacity, tunes and rhythm surging from the speakers. The sound of the radio blacks out the noise of the rising engines, horrid squealing of rubber, and the hatred for losing. He's leaving it behind, watching it settle in the dust behind-forgotten.

The 'Stang shifts gear, telling Jason that it's excited to be here and excited to entertain. Bringing itself to high speeds and drama, now neck and neck with Death, racing down Route 32, past the abandoned railroad station, watch it as it whizzes by. Jason's too concentrated on the road to pay the station any attention, only a passing sign that tells him he's moving, moving fast, letting it go past. In the blink of an eye it disappears over a quiet hill-forgotten.

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They're on a straightaway, hissing and yelling out in the pumping of pistons and engines. Jason breaks

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ahead, little more than inches it seems, but it is there. Wonder what that other creep's doing in there-cursing him, watching, smiling at the insanity of the situation, screaming in frustration, yelling with exhilaration?

"Go, you bitch, down in flames!" Jason yells.

100 mph...his speedometer reads, but it seems so much slower, moving through a thick sludge that drags down his 'Stang and keeps it from going at its best. The dash only goes to one hundred twenty. He doesn't know how much higher the engine can go.

Straightaway is gone in sixty seconds, leaving a winding road of trees and darkness. Jason happens to glance across the way, where he spots Death riding with the windows down, laughing, loving the rush as the two cars fly on, engines laughing with him as he drives with both hands out the window. He snarls at the boy, displaying horrible teeth-long, pointed, and sharp. Jason remembers the gruesome sight as he holds on. A soft curve bends him and the 'Stang to the right, but he-and the opposition-hold fast, tight, even.

Below him, the speed's over one hundred ten miles an hour, drifting up to the one hundred twenty mark. If the other's engine is too powerful, then watch and let it go. Oh, but the other is playing with him, driving him crazy even though his car is probably doing the exact same thing, beginning to whine and shake at the tremendous effort. Finish line must be coming soon, or he fears a blowout.

Lucky for him, the other hasn't taken advantage. The curve behind has drifted back into darkness, leaving more of the straight Route 32 ahead. Jason realizes that they are soon to converge onto Highway 90. Jason silently vows that if he makes it to Highway 90, he's going to ditch the race and leave Route 32, leaving this lunatic behind-forgotten. Jason feels like Ichabod Crane, the poor schoolteacher chased by the Headless Horseman. Jason suddenly visualizes an incredible, lit pumpkin head soaring across the way trying to knock him out of the 'Stang and abandon him, bleeding and dying on the pavement. He doesn't want to die on the highway-that's all that matters to this boy. Let the streets alone.

Round another curve, this one sharper, his sweaty palms holding the wheel tightly. Jason suddenly feels desperate, starting to cry with an urge to yell and scream at Death as he rolls beside him, laughing, driving with his hands out the window, and pointing to Jason Keyser. Death curses him in ways that the boy can only imagine. Death yells above the winds that Jason's going to die tonight, that he'll never make it out of here alive. The boy is a fool to race Death. He cannot escape because when Death is challenged, it is always prepared and always ready to deal the final, ultimate, killing blow. Jason screams.

Death is driving without hands, watching Jason, keeping up with the boy so he can't get away. The Corvette matches the Mustang turn for turn, waiting for a fatal mistake so Death can take advantage. But why doesn't he go ahead? Why doesn't he finish it? Because that is his style-even for this horrible entity, style is a desired trait, and the monster knows how to end it in style. It's waiting for everyone, driving, walking, running, soaring above the heavens. Tonight, it's come down from the clouds, descended to the realm of the living, and met Jason Keyser, who's never going to get away.

"You are going to," Death says gritting his teeth, "make the fatal mistake, boy!" Jason doesn't break under pressure. He thinks of this as a challenge, as he watches the trees fly by. Trees that are silent observers in this dark performance, the only observers who will watch this mortal beat Death at his own game.

Over the small bridge, past another intersection that's deserted...

"Let go. I'll beat you!" he screams as the accelerator meets the floor, the car pushing forward past the reach of the other, past its icy cold fingers. Jason's crying, understanding that he's going to die if he's not careful.

120 mph...the engine's peaked, refusing to go any further. Yet the boy's tears dribble over the wheel and seem to give it new life, keeping it at its rapid pace. Slowly, it moves up the scale.

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121...122...123...oh please, let him reach 125, then, God, make him be gone!

It's too high for the engine that wants to quit, rest from this sudden strain. Jason wants to rest, though rest is impossible when Death waits for your wrong turn of the wheel.

Above him, there is a flash of blue and green-the sign indicating Highway 90 is only a half-mile ahead. The sign goes by in a flurry of color that's dizzying. Only thirty seconds and life will be saved, Death will be gone, and safety will be found.

The other must be reading his mind, because it has caught up with him. Death pilots in his cockpit, shaking his head to say, "No, Jason, you're not getting away that easily."

Jason rules the streets, or so he thinks.

120 mph...

The speed drops, as the car still hangs on, unforgiving. The engine can't hold out much longer, but it's sworn to give the driver the ride of his life. It has sworn to protect and serve, to die in a fit of burning rubber and steel. It's slowly dwindling on a burnout as Jason hears its soft aches and moans.

"Oh, please, baby. Please, stay with me. Don't stop on me! Not now!"

It gives him a flurry of pumping and acceleration, enough to get him to the exit, enough to brake it hard but easily, with room enough to pull the wheel to the right. Death is left behind on Route 32, flying past in its midnight carriage. Jason imagines Death's frustration as he holds on to the steering wheel. Jason is praying to God to get him safely through the exit turn.

He makes it. Thinking of Death and its anger, Jason laughs. The radio is blaring at him-drive faster, drive faster!

But Death isn't snarling or throwing a fit. It drives on, fueled by the immortal fires of his century-worn engine underneath the hood of his Corvette-the vehicle of death and destruction. Death will never lose, even after all this time.

And Jason meets him head on, in the form of a broken-down Corvette, blocking the ramp to Highway 90. Jason sees the screaming, grinning skull just as his 'Stang smashes into the front grill. He thinks he can see Death in the driver's seat, waiting. Cheater took a shortcut, was waiting all the time. Lucky for Jason, the seat belt brings instantaneous death.

Jason realized he'd never make it home, never make it to his next birthday. He'll never rule the road, never cruise in his 'Stang, lovely 'Stang, from which he claimed his title and dreamed to be:

King of the Road

He knows it all. Death is King of the Road, the only King.

120 plummets to 0 in the flash of a second.

8.22.1998

When drinking from the cup  
of life, don't sip politely;  
rather let it flow over  
your chin and down  
your chest.

Consciousness needs a proper  
drenching to avoid the  
wilt and shrivel...

Smear the water from  
your face with your sleeve  
and continue on your  
way.

- Young Park



### The Finest Elixir For Life

An old proverb commented that a life without self-examination is not worth living. It brings to light a few abstract suggestions. What's superficial? What causes fulfillment or well-being for the individual? What doesn't? Throughout American history a repetitive cultural element has surfaced advocating a less complex, less complicated, and less pretentious existence; in short, a simple life. Puritans and Quakers advocated this sort of reality, perhaps to a radical extreme. But, the concept, nevertheless, can be applied in a more modern view by encouraging a less extreme and a more relaxed life style, without going overboard. The simple life seeks plainness rather than embellishment. At its heart there is self-imposed personal evaluation and deliberate prioritization of meaningful ideals or values. Additionally, simplicity can be considered an individual state of mind, one that particularly distinguishes between need and want, consequently, looking less favorable upon materialism and avarice.

Simplicity itself was the subject of examination in an article titled, "The Simple Life," by David E. Shi. He remarks that the somewhat abstract topic is a smattering of concepts rather than a mere unidirectional pursuit. The simple life, he comments, "[I]nclude[s] a concern for family nurture and community cohesion; a hostility toward luxury and a suspicion of riches; a belief that the primary reward of work should be well-being rather than money; a desire for maximum personal self reliance and creative leisure; [...] [and] a taste for the plain and functional, especially in the home [...]" (512). Primarily, these values have been, and will continue to be, molded to the individual, in different degrees and fashions. Simplicity is not a subject that uses an equation; rather, it provides an avenue for self-application of what a person holds dear. Shi points out, "[T]he core assumption is that the making of money and accumulation of things should not compromise the purity of the soul, the life of the mind, [and] the cohesion of the family [...]" (513). Material moderation is the key. Evaluating what is needed versus what is not. Shi believes, in this way, everyday people can recapture their will of action by removing "faulty desires and extraneous activities and possessions" (514). It seems evident down home values are advocated here: "family, faith, civic and social service, [...] creativity, and self-culture" (516). He concludes with the indication that those who choose to lead an externally simple and internally fulfilling lifestyle "discover that pressures are reduced, the frenetic pace of life is slowed, and daily epiphanies are better appreciated" (516). Shi's argument is a perfect springboard to continue examining the fine subject.

People, throughout history, have seemed to be labeled as falling into two groups: those that have and those that do not. In some sense, this dichotomy can be applied to physical attributes concerning sufficient consumption and adequate worldly needs. But it also can separate those shackled by everyday psychological burdens. Some are free from stress, carrying peace of mind, and inner harmony, perhaps representing those that have. Others are imprisoned by the everyday rat race, continuously shuffling about in a monotonous cycle, mired in a seemingly awful world of competition and outward judgment. Those leading this unsatisfying trend may hold plenty in the form of material, but little in the form of peace and contentment; and this, to a degree, embodying those that do not have. In this regard, a difference can be established between having in one sense versus

another, peace of mind and appreciation versus retaining complexity and worldly goods.

An article written by Barbara Brandt titled, "Less is More," suggests several interesting points considering overwork, a major concern for those stress-laden and devoid of contentment. Brandt comments upon the obvious effects of a more laid-back and less intense life, essentially more simple. She contends, "[Many Americans are] trying to squeeze more into each day while having less to show for it. [B]oth women and men-are spending too much time at work, to the detriment of their homes, their families, their personal lives, and their communities" (191). The popular outlook seems to disregard the wholesome and intrinsically fulfilling aspects of what life offers. More, more, more, one might argue, is the passion of many in a vocation hauling in large sums of monetary gain. She further argues, "The work ethic fosters the widely held belief that people's work is their most important activity and that people who do not work long and hard are lazy, unproductive, and worthless. [P]aid work is not just a way to make money but a crucial source of [...] self-worth" (193). Though work is an important part of living, it is not and shouldn't be considered the sole purpose of existence. Viewing work, or any occupation, with such intensity, in order to keep ahead or maintain status quo, may lead to burn-out. True self-worth cannot be measured through numbers and figures, as the work world suggests. Once a person steps away from this busied life of hustle and bustle he may accept "the possibility that shorter work hours and more free time could enable [him] to do much of the necessary rebuilding and healing, with much more gratifying and longer lasting results" (194). Just step back and assess that which is meaningful and adds to rewarding satisfaction. Perhaps the simple life's suggestion of a more relaxed and individually prioritized outlook is just what the doctor ordered.

Primarily, there should be personal reevaluation of everyday circumstances; if an individual is caught in such a trend. A trade-off must be dealt with; gain in the world of money and material, disregarding aspects that are personally dear; or, possibly put the more important parts of life first. In the end, really, what does it matter how many trophies were racked up or deals closed? Were there family times missed or moments of help and service overlooked due to over-extended work times and mis-prioritization?

American culture seems to be permeated by an ideal that seeks over-consumption and materialistic ends. This, among others, is just the point argued by Alan Durning in his article, "Asking How Much Is Enough." He maintains, "[T]he ability of the earth to support billions of human beings depends on whether we continue to equate consumption with fulfillment" (434). It appears, the more an individual receives, in modern culture, that much more is desired. People demand respect from others by consuming the latest and greatest good. The point to be taken from this argument is not to arrive at a depriving end, simply one seeking trimming and cutting back, where possible, for a little economy rather than gluttony. There is no need to move toward unsatisfactory and unpleasant conditions. Certainly, there is more available in life than the want to consume resources, more than just money and materials. Indeed, Durning insists, "The main determinants of happiness in life are not related to consumption at all: prominent among them are satisfaction with family life, [...] with work, leisure, and friendships" (436). Durning additionally pointed to a comment made by a Wall Street banker when he said, "Net worth equals self-worth" (qtd. in Durning 436). Perhaps that banker was on the right track. Many people seem to be entangled in their need to keep up with the latest and greatest, showy

commodities. Though improvement and advancement are important, reevaluate subscribing to the latest rage. Materialism dilutes the happiness discovered in simple interactions by imposing extravagance. A Japanese student commented, "We never have time to find ourselves, or what we should seek in life" (qtd. in Durning 432). Maybe simple living and simple consumption, favoring a little more plainness, is the call here.

Finally, Caverly Stringer, through his article, "Confessions of an Urban Outlaw," suggests the intrinsic goodness of a clear mind. He writes from the viewpoint of a homeless man subjugated by the external filth of street life; however, liberated from materialism, greed, and the so-called rat race in order to elevate himself to a greater plane of self-examination. He describes, showing rather than telling, the greatness of purging the mind of the unnecessary; essentially, a psychological cleansing. Stringer writes, "The fact is, people everywhere seek a purge, a cleansing, an uncluttered perspective. The problem is that loud voices have persuaded us to cease considering human complexities and, for the sake of smooth commerce, to follow more confined and predictable pursuits. Commodities, competition-by such things does conventional wisdom measure the quality of life" (485). He observes the life of the fast lane, particularly bringing to mind yuppies and those involved in the corporate sector. There is plenty of work going on, but no one is moving comparatively ahead in personally fulfilling areas of life. In essence, these people are moving down dead-end alleys. Stringer argues, they continue striving to keep up with the latest and greatest fads for no other purpose than to admit looking good. Though Stringer writes from a relatively radical perspective, his point concerning stepping back and reevaluating what's personally meaningful, possibly seeking a purge, is a good moral supporting a simple life. There is a difference between need and want, an observation that strikes at unnecessary everyday event-oriented complexity.

The simple life by nature is an individual concept. It originates not from popular culture or fashionable wear, but merely from a personally well-ordered life, rejecting superficiality. By focusing on the more wholesome parts of life-family, community, and religion-one might find even greater satisfaction in life. Simplicity is only a suggestion, one that creates a balance or equilibrium of moderation, which favors plainness rather than embellishment. David Shi says it well, "Simplicity in its essence demands neither a vow of poverty nor a life of rural homesteading. Money or possessions or activities in themselves do not corrupt simplicity, but the love of money, the craving for possessions, the lure of conformity, and the prison of activities do" (She 515). Life can be looked upon as black or white, but usually it forces an individual to consider a thousand shades of gray. So too does the application of simplicity. It must be individually customized, representing values personally held in high regard. Simplicity comes from what you may think is right; not what popular opinion dictates. It's your decision to turn right or left at all the figurative intersections of life. What do you believe is superficial? What do you believe will be fulfilling or provide well-being? What do you believe will not? Big Brother isn't there to direct the perfect route. No, it's definitely your decision.

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*Drawing by Sara Helm*

# *The Gleaner*

## *High School Writing Competition*

The English department is very happy  
To have sponsored its sixth  
High school writing competition,  
Which was designed to showcase the  
Work of young writers in the area.  
We are amazed at the talent, sensitivity,  
And ear for language in their  
Poetry and prose.

Our thanks and congratulations  
Go to them, their families, and,  
Of course, their English teachers!

L.M.

## *Anciana*

*The weathered palm trembled there,  
resting heavily on a bony, dust-caked knee.  
I glimpsed it as I passed  
out of the corner of my eye-  
and I froze  
on the crumbling steps  
outside the church of Santiago de Compostela,  
leaving my laughter lingering there half-heartedly  
in the languid summer air.  
My gaze followed the deep crevices  
that lined the ancient, gnarled hand  
snaking through the parched flesh  
like tributaries of a tiny river.  
The knotted fingers extended and curled  
slowly, weakly,  
with tremulous hope.  
I felt the cavernous eyes burning through me,  
and I lowered my head,  
unwilling  
or unable  
to meet the glazed stare.  
They swallowed me  
into their infinite darkness,  
and I ached for the soul  
behind those milky eyes.  
emerging with a pitiful heap of dull Euros  
that I quickly, averting my gaze,  
dropped in the callused palm.  
she observed me in wary approval  
as her brittle lips  
parted slightly  
and a single word escaped  
riding on the crest of her breath as she exhaled weakly-  
"Gracias..."  
My eyes locked with hers,  
for an instant,  
  
and in English  
and Spanish  
I smiled.*

**LAURA BENNETT**  
**The Baldwin School**  
**Ms. Beth Cope**

## Seven Million Rules

The alarm clock exploded before George knew he was asleep, just as it had every weekday for the last four months. Such an early time was deemed necessary by the school board to prevent any public high-school student in the county from getting adequate sleep. The teachers did their part to assist the school board by assigning as many simultaneous projects as humanly possible, thus assuring their students would remain awake until the late-night movies were over. George blindly located the alarm and disabled it.

George navigated to the bathroom utilizing the walls as a guide, for it was even darker now than it was when he fell asleep. After showering, he dressed and descended into the abyss downstairs to eat whatever he could to sustain him until his eleven-fifteen lunch. Despite wakening before the roosters crowed, George found, as always, that he was unable to finish his Bran Flakes if he wanted to catch the bus. He didn't really want to catch the bus; it was crowded and dark, but worst of all was the final destination. His only motivation was the possible punishment he might receive from the all-powerful Superintendent. He departed into the desolation of the predawn morning, hands in pockets, and turned south towards the bus stop.

The taxi-cab yellow school bus roared up the hill, awakening all those still asleep with its unmuffled sound. The bus driver found amusement in jabbing the gas and the brake as the children tried to climb aboard, then watching them tumble off the steps. The casualty count was low today.

The imposing gray fortress loomed ominously as the bus arrived at school. As he crossed the threshold that separated freedom from formalized education, he was knocked back by the presence of thirty-year-old uncirculated air. George tried again, this time with a running start, and forced himself into the narrow hallway that led to his locker. One must possess the flexibility of a contortionist to squeeze through the teeming mass of people and backpacks in the hallways of George's school. George was not a contortionist, and he had much difficulty in arriving anywhere on time. He pushed and twisted and squirmed, fighting the mob all the way.

Starting several weeks ago, construction began on a new system intended to start circulating the stale air. The plan was to tear out the windows in the school and leave the holes open. This could provide cheap air conditioning in winter and affordable heat in summer. Unfortunately the school had few windows to remove, but nobody in upper management realized this and the project continued as planned. Removing one window necessitated closing down the entire floor, so George was often forced to take circuitous routes to his classes. He made it to first period by traveling outside, up a ladder, through an open window on the third floor, across the building and back down to the second floor via a fireman pole.

Today's assignment in science class was a typical one: they had to slow down the speed of light, and they had to do it by tomorrow morning. No sleep tonight! In geometry they had to prove the impossible; the test on it would be next week. The teacher, refusing to speak English, insisted on using an incomprehensible vocabulary that only geometry

teachers understand. George did not like geometry.

Third period meant Physical Education time. Since George was not an omnipotent twelfth grader, he had no choice in the activity that he participated in. Along with all the underclassmen, he was forced into to the dreaded stretching class. The goal of the class was to stretch each muscle until it was long and thin like spaghetti. It lasted forty minutes a day for nine weeks; after that George would be sent to another equally painful activity. If you passed the flexibility test class, however, you could maneuver through the hallways so easily that you might think they were almost big enough. Almost.

Gym was followed by lunch. Lunch was the best time of day, since it was the only time George could eat a hamburger and not get in trouble for it. Eating hamburgers in geometry was strictly forbidden; punishment consisted of a hundred extra proofs for homework. He could also drink something that was healthy and tasted good; such adjectives were not applicable to the school water fountains.

Lunch preceded English and a pop blue-book quiz on analysis of a book he forgot to read last night. Last week's lesson was comma usage; therefore, fifty points could be earned by accurate and insightful analysis and one thousand points were attributed to correct comma usage. George filled four pages without using any commas, for fear of violating one of the seven million usage rules. Unfortunately, one of those seven millions rules states that every proper blue book analysis must contain commas, and George failed.

In Social Studies each student presented their report about a member of the Kennedy Family. No two students had the same person, but they all had the same stories to tell. George fell asleep just after the twelfth reiteration, and he received a detention. During detention he wanted to fall asleep, but his Social Studies teacher threatened to give him another detention if he did so. George stayed awake and caught the five o'clock bus home.

"How can anyone possibly slow the speed of light?" he asked his friend Bryan. They were on the way home from the bus stop. Bryan told him that it was physically impossible, and that it was just a waste of time. George agreed, but homework was homework and it must be done.

George arrived at his house and retreated to the solitariness of his room. He managed to complete his math work before dinner was served, and read his daily quota of pages in his novel. He still had to slow down the speed of light for science; however, it would take him well past my bedtime, and I must get my rest.

**COLIN HANEMAN**  
**Council Rock High School North**  
**Mrs. Hall**

## Freedom

Sometimes I feel like there is nothing holding me down.  
The wind is my best friend.  
The ropes that bind my spirit have separated into thread.  
The knots in my mind have slipped out and I'm finally clear.  
The cloth that covers my mouth is removed and I can speak openly.  
Just as I feel this way I look up to try to fly

But  
you  
are  
there.

The wind is gone,  
The ropes have returned,  
I can't think straight,  
the words are silenced.

You  
block  
me.

**EVAN COBEN**  
**Council Rock High School North**  
**Mrs. Hall**

Sitting in a shelf  
Shoved to the back  
Behind sparkling eyes and smiling faces  
Beautiful, but no buyers  
Cracks bring interest  
Mistaken for imperfection  
Faded eyes recall past onlookers  
Judged as needed mending  
Lips a natural nude  
Changed to Cosmo colors  
Flowered dress faded by layers of dust  
Altered to trendy tastes  
Sitting in a sparkling glass case  
High a top the rest  
Primped, painted, and polished  
Tarnished by perfection  
What have they done  
She was beautiful

**MANDY HIBAN**  
**Council Rock High School North**  
**Mrs. Hall**

## Used and Alone

The existence I led before she came was a lonely one, and I can't say I was ever truly awake. It seemed that I was always sleeping, and I never really felt connected with the rest of the world. From the first bit of memory I have, I can remember that they never really showed me any love or respect. Not once did they show any concern for what I wanted, I guess they already knew what I needed. Nobody would tell me what was to happen next, for I was always kept in the dark. I was never allowed to do anything on my own; they never gave me a chance. However, though them I soon gained a vast amount of information of this world, and all the things in it. I was in peak condition for that time, and I had the capabilities to do things many others couldn't. But possessing great ability coupled with vast knowledge is nothing if one is lonely. Eventually "those that knew best" sent me off to stay at a rather lofty place in northern California; that's where I met her.

It seems like only yesterday when she opened my gateway to life. She brought me home with her that fateful day and gave me a nicer place to rest. Her house was large, open, and right off the coast. So sometimes if it was quiet and you listened closely, you could hear the Pacific. This soothing atmosphere was a much needed change from the hustle and bustle of the downtown San Diego area.

At first it seemed like our relationship was to be strictly platonic, and at first it was. In the beginning, it was more of a symbiotic relationship than anything else. She gave me a place to stay, and made me feel useful, while I helped out around the house. However, our mutual helping relationship quickly grew into a game of cat and mouse. I started to notice some sparks fly here and there. But soon she found exactly the right buttons to push, and, if you pardon the cliché, she really turned me on! We started spending a lot of time together, and ended up living together for two years or so. During this time we explored the world together. She took me surfing for the first time, an experience which I enjoyed greatly, and was finally able to utilize those abilities instilled in me when I was so young. We also went driving together frequently on the I.S. Highway near her southern California residence.

During the day, while she was out, I would gather the mail and help organize her files. With my help she was able to do things she never thought possible, and for once I felt accepted and loved. She took me places I never knew I could go, and she even trusted me enough to help pick out her clothes, a rather touchy subject for women. However, like all good things, this eventually came to an end. After a while, I noticed that our time together grew steadily shorter. I started to observe her irritation with me frequently surfacing, and her temper shorten by the day. She started saying that I wasn't good enough for her anymore, and that she'd used up all of my resources. I began to feel that whatever little time we had spent together was just so she could get what she wanted; I felt, in a word, used.

Then one day, the dreaded finally happened. From the very beginning of the day, everything seemed amiss. She left early one Saturday morning, she usually stayed home on the weekend, and I waited for her return. The whole place just had a bad feeling about it, a cold and isolated feeling that I hadn't felt since my early days. I couldn't help delete the feeling that today was going to hurt. I thought to myself that maybe she'd come home and everything would be just fine, or maybe she just needed some time to herself. But I knew what was to happen, and I knew it was the end. That's when she came home. She walked in with a box, one that looked oddly familiar, covered in cow-prints. I knew at once my greatest fear had been realized, and my time with her was finished. Never more would she surf with me, and never more would I gather her mail. For this wretched new model, which was soon taken from its box, had more memory, more RAM, a faster processor, and a sleeker, more modern-trimmed design. It was only a matter of minutes before the connections were made, and buttons pressed, and the new machine was up and running. It was also not long before I was disconnected, cast aside, and once again... lonely.

**PETER CHACE**  
**Council Rock High School North**  
**Mrs. Hall**

## The Impatient and the Wise

Quickly quickly quickly  
Hurries the scientist to his lab,  
Missing the meteor shower  
He anticipated for so long.

Faster faster faster  
Urges the young mother,  
Missing her baby's first step  
Which she was waiting for so long.

Rush rush rush  
Hollers the businessman to his meeting,  
Missing the crucial notes he wrote  
To seal the deal he wanted for so long.

Move it move it move it  
Mutters the driver under his breath,  
Making a wrong turn from his destination  
He had been traveling to so long.

Steady, steady, steady  
Says the small bird's patient father,  
Whose son is learning how to fly  
A part of life he'll need for so long.

Slow, slow, slow  
Reminds the bee to his friends,  
The hive is very fragile  
They have been building for so long.

Pace, pace, pace  
Thinks the snail to himself,  
Traveling down a path  
He had been voyaging for so long.

Gently, gently, gently  
The beaver chews in concentration,  
To piece together her dam  
She had been working on so long.

Success, success, success  
The kingdom cheers out together,  
The animals have all achieved  
Everything they desired for so long.

Curse curse curse  
The people shout with rage,  
All in too much of a rush  
To fulfill their dreams they had so long.

**LAURYN D'ANGELO**  
**Council Rock High School North**  
**Mrs. Hall**

## An Unending Trip of Guilt

I always cry at funerals. Even when it's someone that I barely even knew, a great-great-aunt or a third cousin twice removed, there's something so horribly saddening and humbling about making your way through a room filled with somber faced people watching the tears well up in their eyes. And on this occasion the dearly departed was someone so near and dear to me that I felt as though a piece of my soul had been ripped out, and from the night that I heard the truth I wandered around in a stupor for days. For it was I who had been driving that night, that night that my friends entrusted their lives into my hands. It was all my fault.

Whenever someone walks into a funeral, you can hear the whole room come to a standstill, the mumbled conversation is stilled, and everyone turns to see who is walking in the door. Is it the mother, sobbing, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief? Maybe it's her sister, still so young, looking so composed, and yet you can still see the grief that will only show itself in the quiet dark of her bedroom. No, the girls walking in are not family. The realization dawns on everyone as Jenna, Katie and I enter the room.

'These are her friends,' they whisper to each other, taking in the scratches and the casts, 'the ones in the car with her, the ones who survived.' Their stares are harsh and judgmental and I try to conceal myself behind my friends to avoid their unforgiving eyes. I know it's my fault, I don't need them to remind me.

I can still see her, Madeline, my best friend since grade school, the one whose life I destroyed that dreadful night. We had all been so happy, singing along to songs on the radio, laughing, gossiping, enjoying life. She had been so animated then, more so than usual, her eyes flashing with laughter, and her beautiful voice carrying throughout the car. Singing was her passion and we all knew that she'd someday make it to Broadway, to grace the stage with her presence and wow the audience with her song. It was I who shattered that dream into a million pieces and cast them to the wind, where they lay scattered on the asphalt amidst the fragments of broken windshield and twisted metal.

I try to wrench my mind away from that awful night in which my life came tumbling down and instead focus on the people sitting around us. Nearby sit a few of our teachers from school, wiping tears from their eyes and whispering amongst themselves in that hushed tone reserved for funerals, and at the mention of my name, I strain my ears to catch the rest of their conversation.

"So, it was Melissa's fault then," says Mr. Mitchell, the chorale director.

"It seems so, apparently she was driving, hit a patch of ice and lost control of the car. It spun out and into the path of an oncoming tractor trailer. It's a wonder the other girls survived," contributes Mrs. Smith, my English teacher, amidst sniffles. "It's a shame, she was such a terrific person."

My eyes blur over with tears. I can see it all in my head: the rain, the trees, the windshield wipers, the guardrail, everything except for the small patch of ice still left over from last week's snow. I felt the slip, overcompensated, saw the headlights of the tractor trailer and amidst the horrified screams of my friends and the blaring of the horn of the truck. I could still hear the radio, playing on and on as if nothing was going wrong. As if that patch of ice had melted like all the rest of the snow, as if we were still driving, laughing, carefree, singing along

to the radio as we always had. I hit the ice and ruined the life of my best friend Madeline, casting her into a coma in which there is little hope of her awakening.

The sound of the organ jolts me from my nightmare and I look up to see the procession as it makes its way down the aisle. Father Davis at its head, then my mother, father and sister, all with their heads bowed and wet cheeks. I wish desperately to tell them how sorry I am for all the grief that I caused them, and that if I could take it all back I would in a heartbeat. But no wishes or promises will raise the body out of the casket that follows them, the casket that holds all that is left of the girl that I once was and of so long to be again. I hear someone near me begin to cry, and in front of me, Mrs. Smith blows her nose and dabs her eyes with a lace handkerchief. My head begins to spin. I cannot stay, I cannot watch this. Clinging to remnants of my life will not bring me back. I flee, unnoticed, from the church, and run as fast as I can, no destination, nowhere to go.

**JAMIE STANTON**  
**Council Rock High School North**  
**Mrs. Hall**

## She Rolls Her Booty

(A Parody of  
"She Walks in Beauty"  
by George Gordon, Lord Byron)

She rolls her booty, like the might  
Of massive animals and portly pies;  
And all that's best of fat delight  
Meet in her aspect and her thighs:  
Weary of futile dietary fight,  
Obviously lacking exercise.

One pound the more, one gram the less,  
Had half impair'd the nameless grace  
Of how she eats with true finesse  
The pumpkin pie that bloats her face;  
Where folds serenely sweet express  
Cakes and French fries consumed  
apace.

Around that waist, and o'er that bow,  
So stout, so ample, yet buoyant,  
The triple chin, the cheeks that grow,  
But tell of days in gorging spent,  
A mind at war with all below,  
A gut whose greed is infinite!

**MATHIEU CUCHANSKI**  
**Council Rock High School North**  
**Mrs. Hall**

### Paper Trail

Papers are obstinate-  
Sulking and only  
Grudgingly complying  
To pleas to rearrange  
Themselves in proper order.

Indeed, they seem to grow  
Little paper-cut feet  
And tip-toe silently  
Across the glass-topped  
Coffee table only to  
Fall-  
Stapled Geronimo whisking  
Neat, complying- smirking...  
Into the wrong binder.

Mind you- don't shout, or rant,  
Or even admonish  
These...pieces of work...  
They carry their grudges forever-  
Or at least until they scrawl upon themselves-  
"Late work."

**JULIA M. SOPER**  
**The American Academy**  
**Dr. Sharon Traver**

## Growing Up With Russy

A dynamic figure, often seen scaling walls and crushing ice: Russy, my 89-year-old babysitter. Russy is an eternal figure, unchanged by time, undaunted by whatever hardships are thrown her way. Who else would have-could have- undertaken and survived a grueling fifteen years chasing after my brothers and me? Most would have been struck with horror at three active boys and a girl, but not Russy: this was literally "kid's stuff" for her.

Russy is everyone's ideal grandmother, the one who looks at home with a child curled up in her lap, the one with whom you bake chocolate chip cookies, the one for whom you gather flowers from your garden, the one who will play Monopoly with you at any time. Short and round, of Swedish stock, she has pure white, short, curly hair, which frames her smiling face like a halo. She has dear sweet eyes- the bluest sort- that peer out from large crooked glasses. Her gently-wrinkled face holds many expressions: smiles for laughing, smiles for a beautiful day, smiles for an early spring glimpse at her pink Rose, smiles for our stinky but lovable dog Cally, smiles for chats about my fencing tournament- all the smiles, and all the memories, stored up from all those years and aged to perfection.

Russy has to keep moving at all times- "it's the Swede" in her. No TV, no sitting around and moping, no daring to say, "I'm bored." As firm believer in Fresh Air, she escorts my little brother Sam outside in all but the worst weather. Even when Sam was only months old, and the weather was fairly cold, out he went in a carriage, all bundled in winter snowsuit and blankets, Russy by his side, cooing and talking to him until he drifted off.

Outside, Russy presides from her throne, an old beat-up folding patio chair. She enthusiastically encourages Sam in the sand-box to build the castle higher and expand it to moats, secret tunnels, and elaborate parking lots for all the soldiers, matchbox cars, and huge construction trucks she brings for him from her collecting campaigns at the thrift shop. While he is thusly occupied, Russy pulls a few weeds ("It's good exercise, you know!") and picks a couple daisies for a vase in the house. Hearty laughter comes from Russy and then Sam when the tower goes too high and the whole thing collapses.

A woman of her word, Russy uses her imaginative mind and stubborn pride to solve any problem. One of my earliest memories was when I was- how can I say this delicately?- unable to keep my bed dry at night. This problem may not have been serious for a child of two or even four years, but I was almost seven. Yes, my dreary parents we had tried everything: coaching, bribes, no H<sub>2</sub>O, constant threats. At one point my mother, at her wits' end, ordered help, and a little mechanism with two small metal plates that buzzed loudly when moisture was present soon arrived at our front door. All it did was get my dad to come in and change my sheets without calling him.

Maybe my dad would wake up every night and change my bed, but if you think Russy would, guess again. She was determined not to let me wet my bed while she was in charge. Sure enough; when my parents were away, I stayed dry. Russy told me

that she had gone into my room when I was asleep, got me up, walked me down the hall, and made me go. I had no memory of any of this happening, and I didn't really believe her, but after that, no more waking up in the middle of the night with wet sheets.

An animal lover, Russy is quite good friends with my cat Dolly and my dog Cally. Dolly, an outdoor cat, needs to be fed only occasionally and is no trouble at all. However, Cally, a mischievous West-high-land white terrier, has to be fed, then let out every once in a while, and then brought back in. Sometimes late at night it can be hard to get her to come in without physically carrying her. Once Russy was pet-sitting, and late one night Cally wouldn't come in. Russy called and called but to no avail. Then Russy's imaginative, problem-solving mind kicked in. She called out the door, "Cally, if you come in, Russy'll take you for a ride in her car." And what do you know, but the devilish dog actually came in. So did this 89-year-old woman really take this naughty dog for a spin in her car at eleven o'clock at night? You guessed it. True to her word, Russy put Cally in the car and drove around the neighborhood.

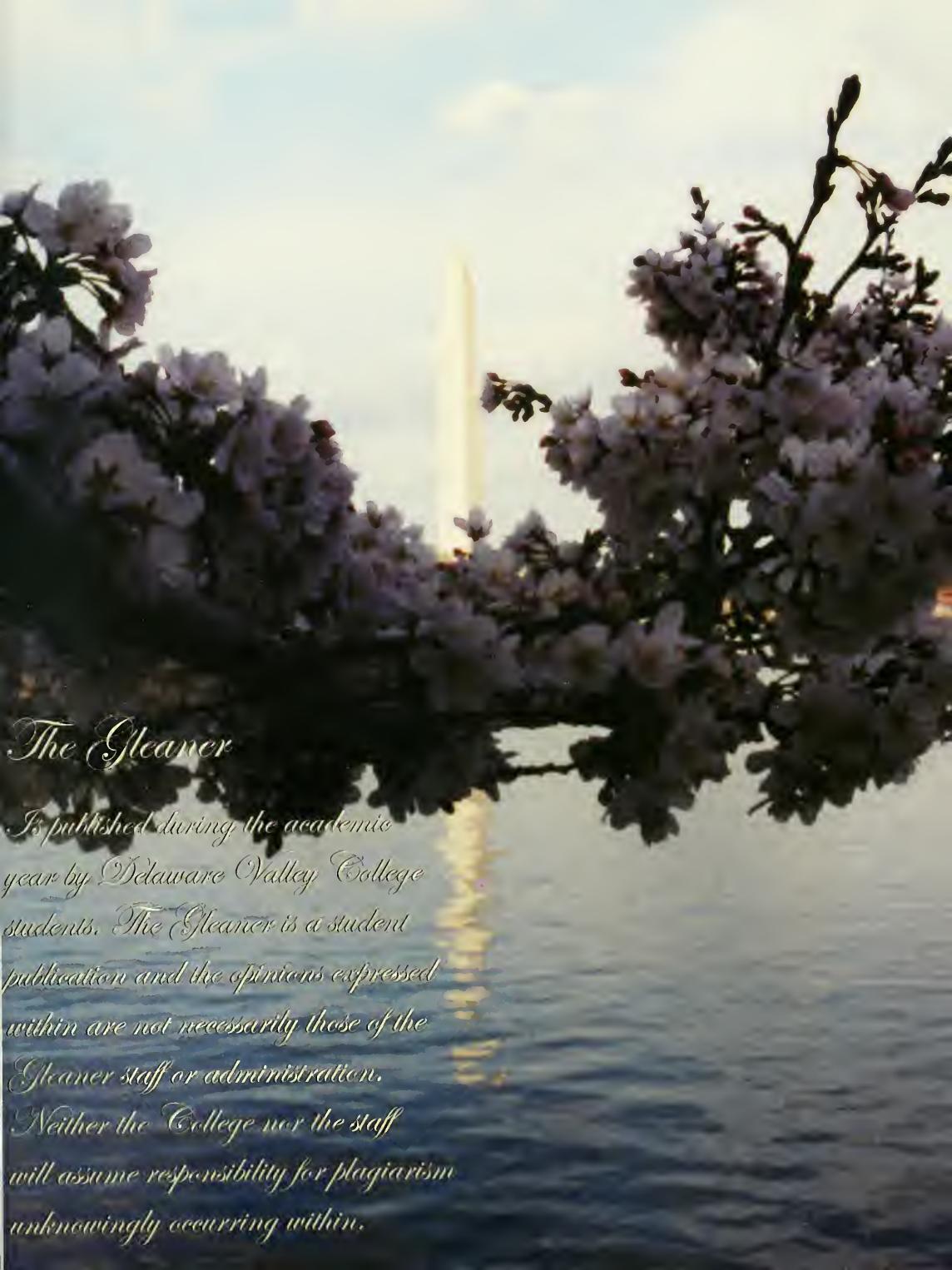
I hope that Russy will be able to babysit my kids and keep them in line as she did my brothers and me. The world needs more real babysitters, not the wimpy ones you get for an occasional Saturday night, but the character builders, who radiate happiness, who don't need to resort to threats. On the contrary, for Russy we are glad to do anything to widen that smile. My mother stands in awe when my brother walks out the door with the trash bag slung over his shoulder. "How do you do it, Russy?" and Russy answers, not without a twinkle in her eye, "I asked him to!"

**KATHRYN ANTHONY**  
**The American Academy**  
**Dr. Traver**

## Living in the Past

She looks in the mirror  
denying what she sees  
She refuses to accept  
the graying in her hair  
the lines around her eyes  
She doesn't comprehend  
that never again  
will she look the same  
in those short shorts  
and low cut shirts  
as she did when she was young  
She dyes her hair  
to hide the gray  
uses creams, and lotions  
to decrease those awful wrinkles  
and forces herself  
into clothes meant for a generation  
that is no longer hers  
She looks in the mirror  
and doesn't see the beauty that others do  
She refuses to accept  
the light touch of gray in her hair  
the lines framing her eyes  
proving a lifetime filled  
with laughter and happiness.  
She's trying to live  
as a girl she is no longer  
refusing to accept  
the disguised gift  
that age has brought her.

JAMIE STANTON  
Council Rock High School North  
Mrs. Hall

A photograph of a lake at sunset. The sky is a warm, golden-yellow, transitioning to a darker blue at the horizon. A bridge arches across the water, its silhouette dark against the bright sky. In the foreground, a branch with clusters of small, light-purple flowers (likely cherry blossoms) hangs over the water, partially obscuring the view. The water is calm, with gentle ripples reflecting the colors of the sky.

# *The Gleaner*

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